Out of the Jaws of Death

Frank Barrett

H. Stephen

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BY

FRANK BARRETT

Author of "The Admirable Lady Biddy Fane," "Fettered for Life," etc.

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Out of the Jaws of Death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OLD ENEMY.

I MADE my way down to the Embankment, and hurried along on the less open side till I caught sight of Gordon and Taras strolling some distance in advance on the other side of the road; then I relaxed my pace, still keeping them in sight until they reached Lambeth and went into our house together.

Taras had obviously returned for fear his absence might alarm me, and his genial companion, having accompanied him so far, had turned in to finish the night over a last pipe. With a little hesitation I drew near the house, and hearing their voices in the front room, I quietly opened the front door, entered, shut the

door as silently, and then slipped unheard up to my room.

"I'm glad you didn't sit up for me last night," said Taras, when we met in the morning; "Kavanagh dropped in with some startling news from the House"—he held some official post there—"and I stayed out a couple of hours later than I intended."

Kavanagh called in the course of the afternoon. He asked if Taras was at home, but instead of going directly up to the workshop he came in to see me. After exchanging the customary civilities in his ordinary tone of voice, he raised his finger with a significant glance, crossed the room, and opened the door softly, but with such celerity that had Mère Lucas been eavesdropping he would certainly have discovered her. He stood in a listening attitude for a few seconds, then, closing the door noiselessly, he returned to his seat with a shrug and a look of vexation in his face.

"Nothing has happened?" he asked, as he seated himself near me.

"Nothing—to him."

"To anyone else?" he asked sharply.

"Nothing of any importance."

"Mère Lucas betrayed no signs of irritation when he went out last night?"

I shook my head.

"She was just the same as she always is—just. If there had been any difference I must have seen it."

"She did not go downstairs in the night, you think?"

"After Taras went up I put my door wide open, and kept a light burning all night. No one could pass my door without my knowing it."

"Your vigilance may have warned her. On the other hand——" He broke off and, nursing his knee, sank his chin in his hand, knitting his brows in thought. Suddenly raising his head, and turning to me, he said—

"I am afraid I must confess to having been

fooled. I am still more afraid that I have done Mère Lucas a great injustice. You have a far better knowledge of her character than I. Do you think her capable of deceit and trickery—of conspiring at the ruin of her master?"

"No, that I don't. I believe she's as good as anyone."

"I'm sincerely glad to hear you say so. It seemed unlikely to me; that is why I felt it necessary to say nothing on the subject to Taras."

"He'd never have believed you."

"That was another reason for saying nothing till I had absolute facts to support my suspicion. You have not said a word to him, or her either, I hope, with respect to my communication?"

"No, not a word. But how about that friend you spoke of?"

"Ah! there again I believe I was all at fault. I believe she is no more a conspirator than poor old Mère Lucas herself. I find she is a cook at a restaurant in Greek Street,

and so, of course, she is not at liberty to come here and see Mère Lucas." He looked terribly vexed as he admitted this. "Do you know a man named Matveef?" he asked abruptly.

"I think I've heard the name, but I don't know him."

"He's one of the poor beggars who come to sponge on Taras. It was he who put this precious nonsense into my head. The fact is, the lower class of Nihilists are like a set of starving dogs—jealous of each other, and ready to snap at anyone who seems a little better off than the rest. It is natural that they should envy the old woman her comfortable position here; but it simply proves what a treacherous, faithless lot they are when one can circulate such slanders as this. I fear I have made you very anxious; I hope you will forgive me. For the sake of Taras, whose life is so dear to us, and of such enormous importance to the welfare of his country, one cannot afford to turn

a deaf ear to any hint at such a time as this when real peril exists."

"That's all right. I feel just like that. Don't you mind telling me anything: I'd rather know it than not, if it frightens me ever so much. Besides, it makes you feel so light-hearted and happy to find it isn't true that you can't be vexed by what's past."

"You cannot have better philosophy or better feeling than that," said he, shaking my hand kindly as he rose.

The feeling of relief, now that I had no longer any serious reason to regard Mère Lucas with mistrust, or look for the development of some sinister design, afforded me such happiness that I almost forgot the existence of danger; and for the rest of the day my spirits were as exuberant as they before had been depressed.

Mère Lucas and Taras, who must have observed my constraint and uneasiness in the morning, would have found it difficult to understand this sudden change for the better, but

that Gordon dropped in soon after Kavanagh's departure and stayed to dinner. Now that business brought him to Lambeth every day, Gordon was continually "dropping in." Mère Lucas had never ceased in her efforts to bring us together, and from sheer good nature, rather than from any other feeling, Gordon had yielded to the pressure she brought to bear on him, and fallen into the way of paying me civilities whenever he came. These attentions, together with a certain bashful awkwardness in my presence, chiefly arising from the poor fellow's difficulty in speaking French, and the reputation for being fond of ladies' society, had, I think, led Taras also to believe that something besides friendship brought Gordon to the house so frequently. At any rate, I imagine they attributed my change of mood that day to his influence.

For the reason I have indicated I was more than usually amiable that afternoon, and when Taras came into the room he found Gordon

blushing prodigiously, and both of us laughing heartily over Gordon's ludicrous breakdown in an attempt to describe the plot of a serious play he had witnessed the night before. Taras, I remember, was particularly kind to me that evening. There was something almost paternal in his gentleness, but it was marked with a touch of sadness which I could not quite account for.

I dwell on this incident because, trivial as it seems, its influence upon the course of later events was exceedingly great.

A false sense of security, resulting from the false alarm that had disturbed the even balance of my judgment, lulled my anxiety for a time, and when Taras about a week later told me that he should not return probably till two or three o'clock from the smoking concert to which he had been invited, I bade him "Good-night" as he went out after dinner without any feeling of alarm.

That afternoon my dressmaker had sent to

say that the dress she was making for me would be ready to try on in the evening. Nothing could have happened more opportunely, for I intended to take Taras by surprise with this beautiful velvet, and here was the very chance I needed of getting the important work of fitting done without his knowing anything about it.

The moment he was gone I ran to my room, dressed, and, telling Mère Lucas where I was going, for she was in the secret, I started off for Kennington Road, where my dressmaker lived.

It was between eight and nine ; at that time Lambeth Road is deserted. Heavy rain had fallen in the afternoon, and such sounds as there were seemed particularly clear. The rattle of a train over the railway bridge, a whistle from a tug on the river behind me, were noticeable by their distinctness ; my own footsteps as I hurried along made quite a clatter on the wet pavement.

Struck by this fact, I presently fancied I could hear an echo to my footfall. Was it that,

or some one following? To satisfy the idle doubt I glanced back. Just within sight a man was following. There was nothing in that to call for particular attention; but when I had gone another hundred yards or so the echoing sound arrested my wandering thoughts and I glanced round again. The man's figure was there exactly at the same distance. It was odd that both should be walking in one direction at a precisely similar pace. For the next hundred yards I walked slower, but the following step came no nearer, and when I turned, the man's figure appeared to be just as far off as before.

It was unpleasant even to fancy that my steps were dogged, and I turned the corner of Lambeth Road sharp, with a determination to go on at a still quicker pace now that I was out of the man's sight, but the whistle of a tram suggested a still better means of avoiding annoyance, and I stopped, with the determination to ride the remaining distance.

Just as I stepped into the car the man came

running round the corner from the Lambeth Road, and as I took my seat he sprang on to the footboard. As he passed the door to go up the steps the light from within fell on his face. There was no mistaking the yellow complexion, the sparse black beard and high cheek-bones, nor the sunk head and high shoulders.

It was Drigo!

CHAPTER XIX.

I GIVE DRIGO THE SLIP.

The mental process by which I arrived at the conviction that the man outside was Drigo took a longer time than I have indicated. In the moment that he stood in the light I recognised certain peculiarities in his appearance that were familiar to me, but it was only when I conjured up that face and figure again in my imagination, asking myself where I had seen them before, that I identified them with the man whom I had last seen in the cellar of the "Mariner's Joy." But was it he—could I be sure that my imagination had not deceived me?

This question was unsolved when I got out

of the tram at my dressmaker's. The car moved on; but, glancing after it, I perceived the man hastily descending. He must have waited till he saw me step out on to the pavement. My conclusions were verified: the man was Drigo, and he was pursuing me, and I could only hope, as I slipped into the house and hastily closed the door, that he had lost sight of me in getting down from the car.

"Lor', miss, what is the matter?" asked the dressmaker, astonished by my rapid entrance, my eagerness to shut the door, and my trembling agitation.

"A man has been following me from Lambeth."

"How unpleasant. But there! an attractive young lady like you must expect that sort of thing in London."

By her arch smile she seemed to regard this as a not altogether disagreeable sort of flattery; but I had reason to see it in another light. Why was the man pursuing me? My first

impression was that he intended to do me personal violence, that he sought an opportunity to revenge himself for the mischief I had done him at the "Joy;" and I own that my courage was not proof against this prospect of violence. With the terrors of going home alone before me, I found little pleasure in trying on my dress and discussing the matter with my dressmaker, but I lingered till she had nothing more to say and I could invent no pretext for staying longer.

I looked round eagerly when we went to the door; and to my great relief saw no one who looked like Drigo. I concluded that he had lost sight of me, or gone off on a wrong scent.

"It rains a little; may I lend you an umbrella?" asked the dressmaker.

"No; I think I will wait for a tram," said I—"that will take me home to my door," and when the car came in sight I bade her "Good-night" and ran down to stop it. As I stepped

in my heart quaked, for I saw the man I dreaded come out from the shadow of the wall, and before I had found a seat I heard his foot grating on the steps outside.

It was a Westminster car—not, as I had hoped, one that would take me to Lambeth. To avoid the terrible stretch of deserted street I went on as far as Hercules Buildings. That gave me a little start, for, until he saw me get out, my pursuer could not tell which turning I should take. Glancing up I saw Drigo's hideous face peering over the railing to discover who was alighting, and the moment he recognised me he began to scuttle down the steps.

I ran, without stopping, till I reached the tavern at the Lambeth Road end of the buildings, thinking, in my weakness, that I would seek protection there, if he were on my heels, rather than venture alone on that last strip of deserted road. I had made up my mind now that the enemy of Taras had resolved to put me out of the way as a preliminary to attacking him, and

had given the job to this villain. But he was still at some distance—just near enough to keep me in sight, no more. It would be absurd to ask for protection from a man so far off, I said to myself; and, ashamed of my cowardice, I again took to my heels. He might have overtaken me in a few minutes, and there was no one to prevent him strangling me in the open road had he chosen; but he came no nearer. Whether I ran or whether I walked, whenever I turned, he seemed to be precisely at the same distance from me—just near enough to keep me well in sight, no nearer; and, as I stood panting at the door, waiting for Mère Lucas to let me in, I perceived him standing motionless by the lamp-post at the corner of Lambeth Palace.

Concealing my trepidation from Mère Lucas as well as I could, I hurried up to my room, and there tried to find an explanation of this strange pursuit. As I grew calmer, and my thoughts more collected, one fact became more and more evident: Drigo would not have suffered

me to escape in this way had his designs been directed against me; his spirit of revenge would not have rested content with giving me a scare. And, as he had not taken advantage of this opportunity to injure me, it was scarcely credible that he would make any further attempt in that direction.

"Probably," I said, going to the window to reassure myself, "seeing that I have come in, and am not likely to go out again to-night, he has gone away."

But, looking out under the window blind, I discovered him standing on the Embankment, over against the bridge, nearly opposite the house. What did that mean? A solution of the mystery began to dawn upon me as soon as I perceived this: the man had been posted here to watch my movements, and this suspicion quickly took the definite form of conviction. An attack was to be made, not on me, as I had foolishly imagined in my fright, but upon Taras; he was to be waylaid on his return by the gang, who had

detached Drigo to prevent me communicating any suspicion of their design to him. But a week before I had watched outside Grandison Chambers and followed Taras home. That fact might very well be known to the secret enemy, who seemed to be acquainted with every movement of Taras, and clearly explained the object in setting an outpost to watch me. As I recalled this incident, the figure of the man who drove Kavanagh's brougham came before my mind, and I saw again the furtive glance of suspicion with which he regarded me. Might he not be a spy obtaining information by some covert means from Kavanagh?

Mère Lucas came to the door and bade me "*Bon soir.*" When she was gone I went to the window and peeped again behind the blind. Drigo had not stirred from his place at the foot of the bridge. His presence served to confirm my suspicions, and I saw that Taras, to be saved, must be warned of his danger. But how was I to reach him? Drigo's eyes were fixed

upon the house, and it would be impossible to go out without being seen by him. There was a tacit menace in his taking a position so open to view.

"You know I am watching you," it seemed to say, "and it's no good pretending that I'm not. You can take it as a warning to stop where you are."

He would certainly know my intention if I dared to go out again, and as certainly would take prompt measures to defeat my object. Oddly enough, the possibility of being knocked down, or even murdered, did not terrify me in the least now—possibly because my mind was too occupied with the consideration of Taras's peril to feel any concern for my own; but I saw clearly enough that it would not do to expose myself to a personal encounter with Drigo: that would not save Taras. Yet, how could I get to Taras without that risk?

In seeking an answer to this question, it presently occurred to me that workmen had been

doing something to the wall which separated the yard from Gordon's pottery, and I recollected hearing that an opening was to be made to facilitate the transport of the group to the kiln where it was to be burnt. If I could get into the pottery I might find an exit in the street at the back, and so get away unseen and unsuspected by Drigo.

Leaving the light burning in my room, I ran down to the kitchen, provided myself with a candle, and silently went out into the yard. A heap of bricks and rubbish showed where the men had been working; and on lighting the candle I found, to my inexpressible joy, that a break had been made in the wall, and roughly closed for the night with a couple of boards. I pushed one aside, and found that I could easily get into the cellar beyond, where I saw the square blocks of clay piled up from floor to ceiling.

Confident that I should discover some means of getting out of the works, and impatient of

delay, which might involve the loss of all that was dear to me, I resolved that I would start at once, though I might have to wait four or five hours outside the club for Taras. There was no need to go back to the house. I still had on the things I wore to go to my dressmaker, my mind having been too engrossed with graver matters to think of removing them.

With some little difficulty I made my way through the cellar into the warehouse, and thence through an office into the shop, and here I thought I had nothing to do but unbolt the door and walk out. But when I came to examine the fastenings, I discovered a fact which I might have foreseen, knowing that no one inhabited the pottery—the door was locked on the outside. My heart fell, and I stood looking at the solid lock stupidly for some moments, quite overcome by the hopelessness of my position. Then tears of vexation springing into my eyes, and setting the candle on the counter propped against a jar, I did what I think most

women would have done in such a moment of desperation. I took the handle in both hands, and, turning it vigorously this way and that, attempted to pull the door open by main force. It resisted all my efforts, but the vibration extending to the jar, down fell the candle on the floor, leaving me in total darkness, and with no means of relighting the candle.

I gave one more desperate tug at the door, and then, abandoning all hope, I began to grope about with a view of feeling my way back through the labyrinth by which I had come. I had passed a vat sunk in the ground. I had gone up a broken ladder to reach the warehouse, and nearly stepped down an open trap door, and the steps from the warehouse to the office were so encumbered with jars and gingerbeer bottles that I must have swept them down if I had not kept my skirts together. How was I to steer my course in the dark through all these perils without coming to grief? At the first step something went over with a crash. In the

silence that followed my ear caught the sound of a distant footstep, and then the heavy scrape of a nailed boot on a ladder and the rustle of straw on the warehouse floor. With unreasoning terror I figured Drigo pursuing me hither, and my heart stood still with the consciousness that I was utterly at his mercy.

A glimmer of light appeared. It grew stronger, and then a pair of rough corduroys appeared at the head of the steps, with a lantern on one side and a crowbar on the other; but the next minute I breathed again as a man came into sight whom I recognised as a hand employed in the pottery. He could say nothing for astonishment on finding me there in place of the housebreaker he probably expected to see.

I forget what excuse I made; it must have been absurd, for the man looked more perplexed than ever as he listened to me; nor was his amazement lessened when I made him understand that I wanted to leave the pottery without going back through the yard.

"Well, miss," said he, "there's only one way you can go out if so be you don't want to go back the way you come, and that's the way I come in when I've got my fires to look after, as the case is to-night. It's a longer way round and a sight dirtier, for you'll have to go through the coalyard and out into Ferry Street, where the road's all up for the drains."

The eagerness with which I agreed to take this roundabout and unpleasant route must have led him to doubt whether on the whole I was quite in my right mind; and, indeed, my exultation and joy were little short of madness when I got out into Ferry Street, where I knew I was quite safe from Drigo.

CHAPTER XX.

A PURSUIT AND RESCUE.

A SIMPLE scheme of action suggested itself to my mind as I hurried along the back streets, and coming into Kennington Road I looked about for a cab. A smart new hansom stood by the kerb in the light of a public-house, and as I stopped, wondering if it were disengaged, the driver came out and said briskly, "Cab, miss?"

He was as smart as his cab, and looked more like a gentleman's servant than an ordinary cabman. I liked the look of him.

"Are you disengaged for a good long while —perhaps four or five hours?" I asked.

"Where do you want to go, miss?"

"Burlington Street. You will have to wait there for a gentleman, and he may not come out of his club before two o'clock."

"All right, miss. If it ain't running along all the time, I don't mind how long I'm on, in a manner of speaking."

"If you do what I tell you I'll pay you just what you ask. Can you put out that light inside?"

"Certainly, miss."

He stepped in and extinguished the lamp that hung at the back; then he pointed out a speaking-tube at the side, and showed me how I might communicate with him without using the awkward little trap in the top, and he also showed me how I might close the patented window in front in case the rain might drift in. He seemed to understand my position to a nicety, and I cannot help thinking that this was not the first time that smart cabman had been employed in delicate service.

"We're pretty near there, miss, and it's

coming down a bit sharp if you'd *like* the window shut," he said to me through the tube when we had passed Charing Cross; and then, when I had acted on his suggestion and drawn the glass before me, he asked which end of Burlington Street he was to drive to.

"The Pantheon Club," said I; "draw up, if you please, so that I can see any one who comes out."

He carried out this instruction admirably, placing his cab where I commanded a perfect view of the steps leading to the club door, and leaving just sufficient space for other cabs that came and went to pull up easily in front.

A good many visitors went into the Pantheon. I saw them distinctly as they walked up the steps in the light that came through the open door, but a long time passed before I distinguished any face that was known to me. It must have been after twelve o'clock when Kavanagh's brougham pulled up in front of us. No one got out of it, but I identified the driver at once

as the man whom I had seen waiting outside Grandison Chambers; and I fancied, as he slowly got down from the box, that he cast the same suspicious glance at the hansom that he had cast at me that night.

The drifting rain had bedewed the window in front of me, completely obscuring the glass, except at the extreme edge, where a projection of the cab sheltered it. Through this narrow space I watched the man with eager excitement. Stamping his feet, as if for warmth, he began to walk up and down the pavement; and I noticed that every turn he came a little nearer my hansom, casting his ferrety eyes at the window, as if to pierce the obscurity. This manœuvre did not escape the observation of my smart driver.

"How long are they going to keep us here, mate?" he asked, when the man had stamped up almost within touch of the cab.

"I don't know. How long have you been waiting here?"

As he spoke he approached so near that I thought it advisable to crouch down below the level of the window.

"Oh, long enough to wish I hadn't got the job. What's on?"

"A concert or something."

"Then we may make up our minds for another hour or more of it. They don't turn 'em out of these clubs before two. Got a light?"

A match was struck and a few more remarks were exchanged; and then, the stamping of feet fading away, I ventured to raise my head just as the man was stepping up to his seat on the brougham. His curiosity was satisfied.

Soon after this two men came up and spoke to him. One wore an ulster, the other a pea-jacket. Their faces were unknown to me. The colloquy lasted a few minutes, and then the men separated with a nod: the man in the ulster going one way, he in the pea-jacket the other. Were they also outposts, like Drigo, set to keep

the coast clear for the perpetration of some villainous design upon Taras? If so, which was the directing hand? Not Kavanagh's servant, surely! Could it be Kavanagh himself? While instinctive suspicion was still debating this question with my reason, Kavanagh came out from the club house.

Calmly smoking his cigar, he stood on the steps for a moment or two, looking first to the right, then to the left. After that he sauntered down to the brougham and spoke to the driver. The next minute he turned towards me, and as I leant back I saw the glow of his cigar through the smirched window advancing. I crouched down lower than ever, with the conviction that Kavanagh, the cherished friend of Taras, was his deadliest foe! This was the secret enemy I had to cope with.

"Engaged, cabby?" I heard him ask.

"Yes, sir—worse luck."

Without attempting to disguise his intention, Kavanagh came close to the cab and looked

in through the side window. I know this, for, as I looked up, I saw the light of his cigar reflected in the raindrops on the glass. When anxiety overcame my dread, and I looked out again, he was standing once more on the club steps, looking down the empty street. He had not seen me. He took a last whiff, and then, throwing away his cigar, turned into the house.

The time dragged painfully as I waited, in feverish suspense, for some fresh development of the drama which I felt was being played close at hand. Visitors came out in twos and threes; cabs were called—there must have been a string of them behind us—the street was quite animated for a time; then there was a strange pause, and the next men who came out stood on the steps looking in, as if something unusual was taking place there.

Suddenly one ran down and opened the brougham door. Fearful anticipation of some impending calamity agitated me to such a degree that every object danced and quivered before my

eyes. But I made out a group of men slowly descending the steps, as if they were supporting some great weight, and I distinguished amongst them Kavanagh's light overcoat.

"What is it?" I forced myself to call through the tube.

"Only a gentleman in liquor, miss," replied the cabman in a jocose tone.

Reckless of the consequences, I pushed open the window that I might see more clearly. At that moment Kavanagh was stepping into the brougham, and, the next, I saw the helpless man lifted in after him. The light fell upon his face as it drooped backward. It was Taras!

"Follow that carriage wherever it goes. Keep close to it," I cried, recovering my senses under the same influence that had paralysed them.

"Right you are, miss," replied my driver, gathering up his reins; and as the brougham turned into Regent Street we fell into the string of vehicles close behind it.

What was to be done now? I saw no other

course but to follow the brougham to Lambeth and hold myself in readiness to act with vigour and discretion whatever contingency arose. It was not until we had gone a considerable distance that I began to doubt whether it was Kavanagh's intention to go to Lambeth. Fixing my eyes on the brougham, I had taken no notice of the streets through which we passed. When the length of time that had elapsed since leaving Burlington Street aroused a suspicion in my mind, I found that the houses on each side of the way were quite unfamiliar to me.

"Where are we?" I asked through the tube.

And when the man answered, "Cannon Street, miss," I was no wiser than before.

But soon after this we came into an open space, where I recognised the dark outline of the Tower. Then I knew where we were, and saw with horror that we were approaching the place where Taras before had fallen into the hands of his enemy. If they got him in the

"Mariner's Joy" again, how could I save him?

I had noticed, with growing anxiety, that the brougham had greatly increased the distance between us after leaving the more crowded thoroughfares, a fact that I had attributed to the greater strength of Kavanagh's horse and not to the particular artfulness of my driver. This loss of ground now added to my terror. In the labyrinth of streets beyond the Mint we might lose sight of the brougham and never overtake it.

"Can you go no faster?" I called.

"Faster? I should think so! I thought you just wanted to keep the parties in sight without sorter lettin' 'em tumble to it."

"No—no! Go on quick—quick!"

A flick of the whip doubled our pace. The wheels were tyred with rubber; but as the clatter of hoofs grew more audible to the driver of the brougham, he turned and looked back. We were near enough then for me to distinguish

his hollow cheeks and cavernous eyes; and I think he must have recognised me, for he used the whip freely and increased his speed. Turning the angle by St. Katherine's Docks, I saw Kavanagh thrust his head from the window and look back. For a time the race seemed equal, but I observed that the brougham did not gain on us, though the driver used the whip far more freely than my man. But the terror of Shadwell was still before me.

"Could you get in front of the carriage and stop it?" I called to the driver.

He said he would "have a try at it, anyhow," and with another cut of the whip he shot on and ran wheel to wheel with the brougham. I stood up and, craning out, caught sight of Kavanagh, as we passed the open window, looking across the recumbent body of Taras, his face livid in the light of our lamp. In another minute we had passed, and, pulling in sharp towards the pavement, forced the driver of the brougham to draw up; then, by another rapid movement, my

man turned the hansom so as to completely bar the road, and both vehicles came to a dead stand.

"What do you want?" asked Kavanagh, meeting me in the road as I sprang out of the hansom.

"Taras!" I cried wildly, brushing past him. "Taras!" I cried again, as I stepped into the brougham by the open door with a fearful foreboding that he was murdered.

But his hand was warm, and in response to my repeated cry of agonised entreaty, he opened his eyes dreamily for an instant. Now that I knew he lived my fears gave place to a feeling of exultant joy and confidence. I was there by his side, and his enemies would have to take my life to separate us; and with this delicious assurance I felt almost indifferent as to what might follow. Presently, however, as this ecstasy subsided, I began to take notice of what was passing outside.

Kavanagh was explaining the affair to a policeman, who had seen the finish of the

strange race from the gates of the London Docks. I could not catch what he said, but his tone was offhand and conclusive.

"You wasn't no more asleep than what I am," broke in my driver from the top of the hansom, and his words were strikingly sharp and clear after the low murmur of Kavanagh. "You put your head out of the window before we reached the Mint, and you must have seen well enough as you weren't going to Lambeth that way. You spoke to your man then, and, instead of turning round to go back, he did all he could to get away in the other direction. You'll just take my number, if you please, constable," he added, swinging himself down from his seat. "The gent in there has been hocussed, I'll take my oath. And there's a whole gang of 'em in the job—the driver there, this party that plays the swell, and a couple more of 'em in Burlington Street. We've been watching the whole plant for four or five hours —ask the young lady inside; and don't you be

had by no kid about falling asleep and driver making a mistake. I shall give my evidence if anything goes wrong, mind."

"All right, cabby; all right. I know my duty as well as you do," returned the policeman; and coming to the door of the brougham he asked if I had any charge to make against Kavanagh.

At the same moment Kavanagh appeared at the other window, and, speaking rapidly in French, said—

"Be careful, as you value your friend's life. I warn you that if you make any charge against me, or even mention my name, Taras will be a dead man within a week. I have only one wish, and that is to get Taras home safely to Lambeth. You shall have every assurance you require that I am acting in perfect good faith." Then he added in English, that the policeman and the cabman, who had come to his side, might hear, "Stay with your friend. My man shall drive you home to Lambeth. I will take the seat

outside. You can rely upon the protection of this cabman. He shall follow, and, if we diverge one step from the direct road to Lambeth Bridge, stop us as he has stopped us already, and you can then give me in custody on the charge of conspiracy and abduction. Once more," he added, speaking again in French, and with impressive earnestness, "I warn you that this is the only means by which you can save Taras from certain death."

Fearing the confirmation of this warning even more than a fresh act of treachery, I consented to this proposal, my friend the cabman promising that he would not "give 'em half a chance" of playing false.

CHAPTER XXI.

KAVANAGH CONFESSES.

The movement of the brougham at starting aroused Taras from his lethargy, and he made an effort to shake off sleep, but with a long-drawn sigh his head drooped again the next minute. I drew him towards me, and with his dear face pillowed on my shoulder I could scarcely wish our journey to end.

When we drew up at length at our house in Lambeth, Kavanagh came to the carriage door, took the latchkey from Taras's pocket, and, after lighting the candles in our living-room, came back to me.

"We must lay our friend on the couch in the sitting-room," he said; and turning

to the cabman, who had stationed himself in front of us in evidence of his continued vigilance, continued, "Can you give me a hand here? There's a man to hold your horse's head."

With no pretence at disguise, he called Drigo by name, and the man came from the foot of the bridge where I had last seen him, and silently placed himself in front of the horse at Kavanagh's bidding.

"He will not wake before mid-day," said Kavanagh in French when Taras was comfortably disposed on the couch. "The sleeping draught I gave him is perfectly harmless. You can see that he is not in the slightest pain, poor old chap!"

The tone of affection in which he spoke was not less astonishing than the openness of his confession. The audacity of his hypocrisy astounded me, and yet, as I looked at him bending over Taras with those soft, feminine, eyes, I could find nothing in the expression of his face to belie his sentiment.

"I must speak to you before I go," he continued, raising his head and looking me calmly in the face. "The cabman shall wait outside while I am here; or in the room with us if you prefer it."

"I'm not afraid of you," I replied.

He bowed, and going to the outer door, told the cabman to back his cab and wait there where he could hear if he were called; then he told the driver of his brougham to return to the mews, and bade Drigo go with him. These orders I heard distinctly as I sat on a stool beside the couch where Taras lay.

Kavanagh returned to the room, leaving the doors open, and seating himself on the couch by Taras's feet, he leant forward and said gravely—

"This is the second time you have defeated my plans for saving the life of our friend. Yet I took every precaution that a man could take, short of confiding my purpose to you this second time."

"And if you had done that, do you think I should have helped you?" I asked fiercely.

"Yes, I believe you would. I set a man to watch you, and thought that enough——"

"And so it would have been if I hadn't found means to get away without his seeing me!" I said triumphantly.

"Whether I overrated his ability, or underrated yours, matters little now," said he with a shrug, after regarding me in silence for a minute. "I ought to have told you all; with your help we must have succeeded——"

"In what?"

"In getting Taras safely away. At this moment he might have been on the steamer waiting for him on the river, and on his way to Russia."

I could only look at him in speechless astonishment for a time. Then, doubting whether I had rightly caught the sense of his words, I said—

"You think I would have consented to such a thing as that?"

"Yes; if I had shown you that it was the only way of saving his life. Understand this, the Czar has said that Taras must be silenced—that means that he must be taken back to Russia, where he will be prevented from publishing works offensive to the Czar, or that he will be secretly assassinated, for it is hopeless to think of restraining him while he lives here in freedom. I have done my utmost in that direction. I made it impossible for him to burn the group of statuary until Gordon undertook to build a kiln for that purpose; and it was I who destroyed the group the day before it was to be cast. You know now that it was the hand of a friend and not an enemy who did that."

"You call yourself a friend, who did that?" I exclaimed.

"Yes; and you would do the same if you perfectly realised his position."

"Destroy what he has made—the work so dear to him? Never!"

"Would you rather that he himself should

be destroyed?" He paused for an answer, but as I found no reply to make, he continued—

"Unfortunately nothing is to be gained by it, or it should be beaten down again. He has said that he will carry the work through, though he have to stand by it with a revolver by his side from first to last."

"And he will!" I cried.

"I was as fully convinced on that point as you are before I abandoned the idea. No, there is no other alternative. He must go back to Russia."

"He would rather die."

"But we would rather that he lived. And surely if the means of preserving him were offered you—if another opportunity of removing him should occur——"

"I will not listen to you," I cried with indignation as I started to my feet. "Nothing in the world could persuade me to join you in this shameful plot!"

"For Heaven's sake, be reasonable, my poor girl!" said he in a soothing tone. "You have seen those pictures of prison life, and fancy that Taras would be exposed to such cruelty and hardships as are represented in them. You are altogether mistaken, as he himself would tell you if you asked him. His rank alone secures him against ill-treatment. The Czar is not unmerciful. Imperial interests compel him to take strong measures; his hostility towards Taras is tempered with profound respect for a political adversary of high attainments and unimpeachable honesty. In Russia Taras will be treated with the utmost consideration and kindness; he will be allowed to live where he likes, and the only restriction put upon his liberty will be with regard to the propagation of revolutionary ideas, and this restriction will be but temporary. The country is ripe for revolution, and in a short time the present Government will be overthrown, and then Taras will be free. On the other hand, if he is not conveyed to Russia, his

fate is death. Can you hesitate in choosing which lot shall be his?"

"It isn't for me to choose, nor for you. Tell Taras what you have told me, and let him decide. He is not a fool or a child that we should take his guidance in our hands."

"He is a child in some things—in simplicity and recklessness. Suppose he chooses to face the danger of assassination, as probably he will?"

"What then? You will not find him unprepared, nor me either."

"It is not with me that you will have to deal next time, but with one whose purpose is unbiassed by friendship."

"Friendship!" I said through my clenched teeth, feeling that I could strike the man for the blasphemous use of a word so sacred to my heart. "How dare you speak of friendship? Do you think I am an idiot, to be fooled by a lie? What proof of friendship have you given—you, who have done your utmost to injure the man who trusted you?"

"Not my utmost. Another pinch of powder in his glass, and Taras would never have awoke again."

"If you did not kill him," I said, detecting, as I thought, an expression of cowardice in those soft eyes, "it was because you dared not!"

His silence confirmed my suspicion, and I continued hotly—

"One thing is certain—you dare not try to do it now."

"No," he replied quietly; "I dare not even try to save him again, I fear."

Then he rose and walked across the room, seeing the hopelessness of persuading me and the increasing hostility his words provoked.

"What shall you do when Taras wakes?" he asked, as he turned and came back towards me.

"Tell him everything—all that has happened, all you have said."

He nodded, as if this were no more than he

expected, and took another turn across the room in silent meditation. As he seated himself again in front of me he said—

"We should be friends, having one object in common. The hope that animates us both is only to be realised by joining forces and acting in concert. You doubt my integrity—truth—sincerity. I will try to prove it by a confession which places me at your mercy. I put my life in your hands. At a word you can destroy me as surely as the Czar can destroy Taras. A stronger proof of sincerity no man could give, and all I ask in return is that you will hear me patiently and judge me without prejudice."

"I'll hear what you have to say, at any rate," said I.

He stepped to the door noiselessly, looked out into the passage, and coming back, seated himself still nearer to me that he might drop his voice to a tone which could not be heard outside.

"I am a Nihilist," he began, "a member of

the same secret Society to which Taras belongs. In the service of this Society I obtained a post in the Ministerial bureau at St. Petersburg, where every movement of the secret police came under my observation. By these means I was enabled to warn my Society of any action about to be taken against suspected members. You understand me?"

"Yes; you were a kind of spy on the police."

"I was a spy, and I risked my life in this service. At any moment I might have been discovered and hanged for my zeal. While I was in this office the order came from the Czar to silence Taras. Taras was then, as he is now, my dearest friend, and you can imagine my horror when I heard that this order was to be executed without delay. Happily the Minister found it difficult to lay his hand on a man for his purpose. It was a very delicate business. As Taras was in London it was necessary that the agent should speak English,

not only for the practical working out of the design, but to avoid political complications. It would never do for the Russian Government to be discovered in this plot to violate the freedom of a man so well known and much honoured as Taras. There was one man in the service of the police who eagerly desired to have the job, and that was Rudersdorf, an avowed enemy of Taras. The chief objection to employing him was that he did not understand a word of English. One morning the Minister, after explaining this difficulty and the objection to Rudersdorf, asked me bluntly if I would undertake to silence Taras. 'I don't ask you to kill him,' he said, seeing some sign of repugnance in my face, probably. 'One reason for not employing Rudersdorf is that he certainly would do so. I simply want you to bring Taras back to Russia; that will please the Czar far more than the death of a man for whom he still entertains a strong feeling of admiration. I can give you but twenty-four hours to consider the proposal;

but if you will not do this business Rudersdorf must.' And now," said Kavanagh pointedly, "what answer would you have given in my place?"

"I would have accepted," said I without hesitation.

"I am sure you would. But it was not an undertaking to accept lightly. For you must see as clearly as I that I was bound to fulfil my promise."

"No, I don't see that. If you could deceive the Minister one way you could another. You must have told lies from the very first, and one more couldn't make any great difference to you."

"Lying in this case would have been worse than useless. The lie would be found out as soon as it was seen that I made no effort to silence Taras. Jealousy would prompt Rudersdorf to watch me, and he would be the first to denounce me to the Ministry. The result is certain. Rudersdorf would have been charged

with the mission he coveted. The lie would only have delayed the execution of the sentence, and scarcely so long as I delayed it by those acts which I have already confessed to. Do you follow me?"

"Yes."

"You see that if I had refused the offer I should certainly have consented to the murder of Taras by his enemy, Rudersdorf?"

"Yes."

"And you see that, for the same reason, I am compelled now to keep the promise I made?"

Logical as the proposition was I could not agree to it.

"As the only means of saving this friend from assassination by Rudersdorf," he insisted, laying his hand lightly upon Taras.

"I understand what you mean," said I in a reluctant tone.

"Then you must agree with me upon the course to be taken."

"No," said I with reviving energy, "I will

never agree to that. I have saved him twice single-handed against four or five of you."

"The third time you will have to beat Rudersdorf—not me. If he stood where I stand now, how would you ward off the shot levelled at Taras's heart?"

I sprang up and stood as if petrified between Taras and him; for as he spoke he dropped his hand in his pocket, and for the instant I thought he was about to flash out a revolver.

"My poor girl," he said, smiling, as he drew out his handkerchief, "a couple of shots from that practised hand would kill you both."

"It may be so," I faltered, as I sank into a chair, overcome with a sense of my helplessness. "But he shall kill me first, please God."

He knitted his brows, and turned away, wiping his hands with the handkerchief as if they were wet. When he turned again there was perspiration on his brow.

"You talk of death," he said, "as if there

was no chance of escape, no hope of happiness in all the years before you."

"There is no chance of escape if what you say is true; no hope of happiness if Taras is taken from me. It's useless to go on talking. Do you think I'd give in at the first sight of danger? Not I. I've got to think how I'm to face this other man now."

"Some way of getting out of the difficulty there should be," he said. These words he repeated in a slow, reflective tone, and then he added eagerly, "who knows but that your woman wit might find an outlet where my senses are at fault? Why should not we—you and I—try to devise some scheme by which we may outwit the police, Rudersdorf, the whole lot?"

I regarded him with mistrust, his eagerness, some crafty expression in his half-closed eyes, quickening my suspicions, though these signs were not altogether inconsistent with an ardent wish to save Taras by deceiving his enemies.

"We will see what Taras says about it," I replied.

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed with extreme agitation. "Taras must never hear a word of what has happened to-night. If you will not promise me that upon your oath, I—I—"

A look of dismay—a quick, outward movement with his trembling hands, as if he were abandoning everything — closed the sentence which his lips seemed powerless to finish.

"If I am to believe you," I said after a minute's reflection, "Taras will believe you; and if what you have told me is not a lie, he will forgive you."

"I do not doubt that; his faith is greater than yours. But it is his duty to report this to the Society; and because it is a duty he will do it, despite the mercy in his heart. The Society will judge me by the letter of the law, and my sentence will be death. This is what I exposed myself to by the attempt to save Taras

from the hand of Rudersdorf; this is the fate to which you condemn me the moment you betray the secret I have given you. You are bound to respect that."

"A secret! I have promised nothing whatever. I did not ask you to confess, and nothing binds me to conceal your explanation."

"You forced me to explain — to confess everything—to rely upon your feeling for Taras, if not on your mercy, for a man whose judgment has been betrayed by an excess of affection—the moment you stopped me, and there was question of your charging me with an indictable offence. The merest rumour would suffice to draw down the vengeance of the Society upon me. You must promise to keep my secret."

"If I cannot promise——"

"Then I must leave the country before you can betray me. My life will not be safe here for another day. You force me to abandon Taras, and you take upon yourself all responsibility for what will befall him afterwards. This is what

will follow. When the police at St. Petersburg discover what has happened—and the telegraph will take the news within a few hours of my flight—Rudersdorf will be despatched to fill my place, and all the precautions you may take will fail to ward off the blow which his relentless hand will surely strike. Within a week—ay, less than that—Taras will be a dead man, and you will have to answer to God for his death."

It was I now who trembled.

Seeing the deep impression he had made, Kavanagh proceeded quickly—

"I ask you for nothing that you cannot safely give. I throw aside the hope of inducing you to help me in getting Taras away from London. I merely ask you to be silent for a while—to hold my secret until I have devised some new plan for defeating Rudersdorf and the police. What else can you desire? If human ingenuity, sharpened by the fear of death, can discover means of saving Taras, he shall be saved. Wanton wickedness or madness can

alone lead you to refuse such an offer. You hold a guarantee of good faith on my part; for if you have reason to believe that I am playing falsely, you can at once make this charge against me, and bring two witnesses to support it, punishing my infidelity with death. I will not even ask you to be silent for an indefinite time. Give me but a week—a few days—to think out a scheme, and in return I swear to deliver this friend from the hands of Rudersdorf."

I would not consent at once even to this plausible proposal; but in the end, feeling and reason inclining me the same way, I said—

"I'll say nothing at all for a week, anyhow."

"Keep that promise and I will fulfil mine," said he, springing to his feet, with a look of conviction in his face which seemed to indicate that some scheme for deceiving the police had already flashed upon his imagination.

CHAPTER XXII.

A NEW DEVELOPMENT.

A TAP at the door startled me from the reverie in which Kavanagh had left me a minute or two before; and, turning my eyes from Taras, I perceived the cabman standing, hat in hand, on the threshold.

"Excuse me, miss," said he, apologetically. "I thought I'd just have a look in and see that you was all right before goin'."

"Yes—yes," said I; "it's all right now; and I'm very much obliged to you—how much obliged I cannot tell you—and——"

I put my hand in my pocket.

"Quite welcome, miss, I'm sure. Only too happy to do what I could. Thank you, miss;

there's nothing to pay. The gentleman has given me twice as much as I should have asked. Still, I thought I'd just make sure as everything was all square-like notwithstandin'; and should you want me again," dropping his voice and with a significant gesture as he stepped gingerly forward and laid a piece of paper on the table, "there's my number and the address where I shall always be found. Good-night to you, miss."

He shut the street door softly when he went out, and I again fell into a reverie, sitting on the stool by the side of Taras. Unconsciously my eyes closed and sleep overcame me. When Mère Lucas's step on the stairs woke me I found my face resting against the pillow on which Taras lay, and my brow was moist and warm with his breath. I had but just time to collect my dazed senses, to start to my feet and whip off my crushed hat and ulster, as the old woman entered.

"How!" she exclaimed softly, stopping in amazement. "Is monsieur ill?"

"He came home very late," I faltered in explanation, having failed to prepare myself for the occasion, "and Mr. Kavanagh thought it better that he should lie here until—until he wakes."

"Dear me, that's very strange!" she murmured, approaching the couch in anxiety. Then, after regarding him for a moment in silence, her stout sides began to shake, and she added in a tone of cheerful satisfaction, "Thank Heaven it's no worse than that! One has to see such a thing with one's own eyes to believe it, for I never saw him like this before; but it's odd, all the same;" and again she chuckled, until, catching sight of my scared and anxious face, her merriment was suddenly changed to earnest solicitude.

"Why, my poor ma'mselle, it is you who are ill, not the master, and I was stupid enough not to see it at the first glance. You have been sitting up all night and tormenting yourself about nothing. For, look you, there is really

nothing the matter with monsieur; he sleeps like a child, and see, his skin is as fresh and pink as a young girl's, and when he wakes up he won't even have a headache. Go. He has drunk half a bottle too much—that is all; but that is not terrible, and if the wine was good it is quite excusable. It's a good sign when a man enjoys life and the good things in this world, and forgets himself now and then in moderation, for it's a proof that he's healthy and happy. It's early enough to be saints when we can no longer be merry, look you. Come, each one her turn; you go now to your bed and leave the master to me. He shall lie there till he wakes, and do you sleep till I call you."

I slept all the morning. Mère Lucas was laughing heartily as I went downstairs, but Taras was vexed with himself I saw when we met, and looked only at the serious side of the affair.

"I cannot excuse myself," he said. "I can

only feel very sorry for the alarm and anxiety I have given you."

"That is passed; I have slept it all away," I said, as cheerfully as I could; "and if you are quite well now there is nothing to feel sorry about."

"I am ashamed to say I never felt better in my life. Mère Lucas tells me that Kavanagh brought me home."

"Yes."

"I have not the slightest recollection of anything from the time I rose to come home and found that I could not walk steadily till the moment I woke on the couch there with Mère Lucas laughing over me as if it were the pleasantest thing in the world to see a man level himself with the beasts—or a little lower. I suppose I shall learn more when Kavanagh comes."

Kavanagh came while we were still at lunch, dressed with his customary care and neatness, even to the orchid in his buttonhole, which gave

a touch of foppishness to his appearance. Nothing in his manner betrayed more than ordinary solicitude for the health of his friend as he entered the room, hat in hand. But his dull complexion, the sunken eyes, and deepened lines in his face, noticeable when he came nearer, gave evidence of sleeplessness and terrible anxiety, easily accounted for by me. The first glance shot at Taras and me had assured him that I had not broken my promise of secrecy, and the tone of relief in which he congratulated Taras on looking so well was not altogether due to that fact.

"The most unaccountable thing I ever knew," he said. "You seemed to me to be drinking even less than you usually drink."

"Thanks," said Taras, with a laugh; "I was ashamed to offer that excuse myself. I never yet knew an inebriated man who could not trace his misfortune to having drunk rather less than usual."

Kavanagh laughed with him.

"One thing, though," he protested: "the whisky at that place is most infamously bad."

"It seemed to me to have a remarkably queer taste," Taras acquiesced; "but that, again, I believe, is the habitual experience of the fallen. I hope I did not make myself particularly obnoxious."

"Not a bit. You were simply incapable. By the way, this must have fallen from your pocket."

He laid Taras's latchkey on the table before him.

"My man says he found it in the brougham. If I had thought to look for it there, I might have saved mademoiselle a great deal of alarm; it's not a pleasant thing to be rung up at two o'clock in the morning," he added, turning round to me. "You feel none the worse for it to-day, I hope."

Thinking of Taras, I assured him that I felt very well indeed.

"One object in dropping in," he said,

"was to know if you would like to see the chrysanthemums at the Temple. There is an exhibition for the Press this afternoon which I have to notice for a daily paper. To judge flowers is really a lady's function, and, to say nothing of the pleasure you give me, it will materially add to the value of my article if I have your opinions on the subject."

His back was towards Taras, and a compression of his brows indicated clearly that he had another and more important reason for wishing me to accept the invitation.

I turned to Taras.

"Oh, go by all means," said he warmly.

As I changed my dress to accompany Kavanagh I wondered whether he had already found an expedient for outwitting the Russian police. The suspicion of a yet darker design did not enter my mind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SUGGESTION.

KAVANAGH'S brougham was waiting at the door, but the man on the box was not the driver whom I had seen there the night before.

"I have bad news," said Kavanagh, as soon as we passed Lambeth Palace. "Read that," he added, putting a letter in my hand which he had taken carefully from a leather case.

I opened the folded sheet of thin, blue-lined paper.

There was a black split eagle in the left-hand corner, and on the right of it a printed address in Russian characters. I glanced down the paper, and could make nothing of it, for it was written in the Russian character, but

turning the leaf I found several names in the ordinary Italian hand, and among them was one which struck the note of alarm—*Rudersdorf* occurred several times in the same page.

"What does it say?" I asked. "I can't make it out."

"I thought you understood Russian."

"A few words, but I can't read Russian writing."

He took the letter from my hand and ran through it in sombre silence; then, raising his eyes and fixing them reflectively on the distance, he said—

"It's from the Minister of Police at St. Petersburg. Luck runs in streaks, and ill-luck, too. He writes in the most friendly and courteous spirit, but virtually he offers me my demission—tells me that I have failed to do the work I undertook, and intimates that he shall have to employ some one else. Who that is you can guess."

"Rudersdorf," I said.

He nodded, and turning again to the letter, continued—

"Here are his reasons: 'We have certain information that Borgensky'—Taras, you know—'has made arrangements for exhibiting at an early date in Paris and London casts of a statue in terra cotta, modelled in Lambeth, which must give extreme displeasure to the Czar. His anger will fall upon me, and the production of this statue must involve my downfall. The order given me, now nearly twelve months ago, was to silence Borgensky, and he must be silenced at any cost, even though the cost be Borgensky's life and the loss of your services. With much reluctance—as you, I feel sure, will understand—I have this day instructed Rudersdorf to start for London.'"

He paused, and I held my breath, too terrified to speak.

"'If anything can be done to save the life of Borgensky I know you will do it, and should you succeed you may depend on a substantial

recognition of your services. With this view I have given Rudersdorf imperative and stringent instructions to consult you before taking any action whatever. He will call upon you as soon as he reaches London, and carry out implicitly any directions you may give for conveying Borgensky safely on board the *Volga*. In the event, however, of your having no directions to give him'—that means if I can find no means of getting Taras on board the steamer that is waiting for him—'then Rudersdorf will have the sole management of the affair—to silence Borgensky by such means as may seem best to him—and you will be freed from all further responsibility in the matter.'"

He sighed, and without other comment gloomily replaced the letter in his case.

"When will Rudersdorf be here?" I asked, after an interval of dreadful silence.

"If he left on the same day that this letter was posted he may be here now."

"Now!" I gasped.

"He may be waiting at my chambers this moment to take instructions from me."

The throbbing of my heart seemed to check the words as they rose.

"What—what shall you do?" I faltered.

"Keep out of the way as long as I dare."

"You will go away from London?"

He shook his head.

"Unfortunately, there is danger even in delay. To-morrow or the next day, failing to find me, he will telegraph to the Minister for instructions. He will discover that I left my chambers after the time when I should have received the letter advising me of his coming."

"And then?"

"Then probably the Minister will allow a few days' grace, after which he will wire the fatal instructions that Rudersdorf is craving for—the order to act 'as may seem best to him.'"

"You must see him—put him off on some pretence."

"Yes, that will do for a time, until the Minister loses patience; and all the while we are whetting the appetite of this bloodhound, Rudersdorf. Yes, that's what he is—a bloodhound, neither more nor less! ready to run down any unhappy wretch whose scent is given him. Fancy, he has never seen Taras; Taras has never injured him; and yet from the day Taras first came under the notice of the police this man has vowed to destroy him!"

"What for?"

"Simply to gratify his lust for blood—the cultivated instinct of the bloodhound. He wears a locket on his chain; he opened it to show me one day. It contains two wisps of hair—one a woman's—taken from the heads of victims—well-known Nihilists, whom he hunted down and killed. They are arranged symmetrically, with a space left between them; in that vacant space he has written the name of Taras!"

The brougham stopped; he opened the door

and stepped out, but I was too horrified by what I had heard to move.

"What's the good of going in there?" I asked fiercely when he held forth his hand. "What are flowers to me now?"

"Better come," he said in a low tone, approaching closer. "We have to avoid suspicion. Every man I have employed is a spy;" and, holding out his hand again, he added pointedly, "we are watched when we least suspect it."

We passed through the house in which the chrysanthemums were exhibited; but I saw no beauty in them—nothing but patches of red here and there in varying shades—the colour of blood in all.

We went out into the garden. It was the last day in October. The clouds that had overspread the sky for some days had broken that morning, and it seemed as if summer had returned. The sun was sinking in glory behind the deep red mist; but that hateful colour was

reflected in the ripples of the river—blood everywhere. I could see but that.

"We can talk safely here," said Kavanagh, stopping before a vacant seat—"if there is anything to say," he added despondently.

"Can we do nothing?" I asked in desperation.

He hesitated as if he were weighing alternatives.

"The simplest thing, perhaps, is to warn him of his danger. It may not save his life for a single hour longer. It is scarcely probable that it will enable him to ward off the blow; but if we can do nothing else——"

"I thought you had some idea when you went away."

"Oh, a hundred schemes have run through my mind since then—all mad, impossible, or impracticable."

"Can't you tell me what they are?" I asked quickly, eager to grasp at the merest shadow of a straw floating on the overwhelming waters.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"One must seem more hopeful than the rest," I urged.

"That's true; but—— Well, to confess the truth, I am ashamed to tell you of the only idea that seems to have any possibility of a practical outcome. You can imagine how repulsive it is to my feelings by the fact that the risk of death seems preferable now to realising my idea."

"I don't understand you. Tell me more plainly what you mean."

"I mean this," he answered firmly. "I see no acceptable option but to release you from your promise of secrecy and bolt for my life."

"What good is that?" I exclaimed impatiently. "What does it matter what you do if it cannot save Taras?"

"Warned of his danger he might escape."

"Never! Taras fly from danger! You don't know Taras."

Even in that time of dread my bosom was stirred with pride in my hero's strength.

"I thought perhaps, knowing how great his affection and consideration are for you, that your influence——"

"I would not say a word nor let him see a tear that might influence him against his principles. It would be useless if I did."

"Then what is to be done?"

"That's what we must find out. What is that other scheme?"

"I don't care to tell it."

"And yet you would risk your life and all that! That's nonsense. You seem to be thinking more of yourself than of Taras. Why should you be ashamed of anything that might save him? I should be proud of it. Go on."

"It is true. I am thinking more of my own feelings than of his welfare."

He was silent for a minute; then, after glancing to the right and left to see that

we were alone, he continued in a tentative tone—

"You have noticed the curious resemblance that exists between Taras and—and Gordon."

Taras was such a god to me, so far above all other men, that this intimation took me by surprise.

"I mean in physical appearance," he pursued. "Gordon would answer in almost every particular to a written description of Taras—tall, robust, deep-chested, blue eyes, fair complexion, light hair, about thirty, careless in dress——"

"But their features are not alike in form or expression."

"Pardon me, there is an expression of amiability common to both; for the rest, then, no merely verbal description could depict one man's face so exactly as to defy error."

"I daresay you are right. Never mind that. Go on."

"As I told you, Rudersdorf has never seen

Taras. He has only the written description issued by the police to lead him. Besides that, he will be guided by me."

"What then?"

"Supposing I should misguide him."

"Misguide him! How could you do that?"

"Nothing easier. I have simply to point out Gordon and say, 'That is Taras.' He would believe it without question."

My courage and resolution quailed before the possibilities this hint revealed.

"Then he would kill poor Gordon," I faltered.

"Heaven forbid! Even to save Taras I would not be instrumental to the death of Gordon. Both are my friends. No; the letter I read to you shows that while Rudersdorf is under my direction he will be held responsible for the life of his prisoner. He values his own interest too keenly to disregard the order of his chief."

"What would happen then?"

"Gordon would be seized and taken to Russia in the place of Taras."

"But the moment he seizes Gordon he will discover his mistake."

"How?"

"Gordon does not speak Russian. He knows only a little French. He would say at once in English that he was not Taras."

"Rudersdorf would laugh in his face. Nearly every prisoner tries to get off by pretending he is not the real man but somebody else. They would ask him for his papers to prove his identity. An Englishman never carries papers; and Gordon's inability to produce them would convict him at once in the eyes of a Russian official unacquainted with our customs."

For a moment I ceased to think of Taras; and I saw only Gordon, my genial, kind-hearted friend, torn away from his friends and the occupation which had given him a new zest for life.

"Poor Gordon!" I murmured.

Seeing that opposition served better than persuasion to stimulate my resolution, Kavanagh shifted his ground.

"Poor Gordon!" he echoed. "A man who never injured any living creature."

"What of that?" I fired up. "He has done nothing for mankind that others have not done. There are thousands of men as good as he; there is not another in the world like Taras."

"That is true. But it seems a cruel, an awful shame to make him suffer for no fault of his. It's a villainous thing to do. No; hang it! I can't bring myself to play this treacherous part. I must think of it. I——"

"But you are certain that his life will not be taken."

"As certain as I am that the sun will rise to-morrow. But to him freedom——"

"They will not keep him prisoner for ever," I interrupted again.

"No," he said with a smile; "but," he

added gravely, "he may be kept prisoner for months."

"Months!" I exclaimed, astonished by the lightness of the penalty.

"Possibly." He seemed to misinterpret my surprise. "On the other hand, he may be set at liberty in a few weeks. It all depends on the length of time he has to wait for official examination. The Minister of Police of course knows Taras, and the moment he sees Gordon the mistake will be discovered."

"A few weeks—a few months—that is nothing!"

"To you."

"Or to him. A man with half his kindness would undergo that cheerfully to save his friend. Gordon will agree to it himself, I know."

"I believe he would if we could make him party to the scheme. Unfortunately, we cannot. He is the worst actor in the world. The slightest evidence of complicity on his part would arouse

Rudersdorf's suspicions, and the thing would fall through."

I nodded assent to this, knowing how awkward poor Gordon was. But Kavanagh's hesitation to act still mystified me.

"A short period of captivity seems to you a trifle in comparison with the life of a friend," he observed.

"Yes, it is; and I cannot understand why you hold back."

"There are a good many things that women do not understand, and honour between friends is one of them, I fear. And it is not only this breach of honour which I have to consider," he added in a less resentful tone, seeing that my perplexity had not been removed. "You have lost sight of the fact that this affair dooms me to perpetual exile, if not to death."

"Yes; I forgot that. I understand now. But surely the Society will forgive you everything for having saved Taras."

He shook his head mournfully.

"The Society is governed by hard-and-fast rules, and permits no member to do harm for the sake of the good it may produce. Besides," he added quickly to avoid criticism of this very anti-Nihilistic principle, "they will certainly regard this as an expedient to escape the penalty of previous acts. It is useless to cheat myself with false hopes; if we carry out this scheme I must prepare to fly the country the day that Gordon returns."

We both sat silent for a little time, I feeling that the sacrifice could only be made by free will.

"One thing," said Kavanagh at length in a lighter tone—"one thing that pleases me in this idea is that it would completely crush the enemy. When Gordon comes back and makes his experiences public, there will be such a blaze up in the papers that the Russian Government will not dare to make any further attempt to kidnap Taras; Rudersdorf, for permitting himself to be cheated, would probably be awarded a life-long

post at Archangel as a reward for his services, and Taras would be suffered to live in peace."

"That is worth a great sacrifice," I said.

"Yes; I will think of it. Come, it is time to return."

On our way back he said—

"I am glad I have talked it out with you. One sees things so much more clearly by the light another mind throws on them."

And as the brougham stopped before the door he said—

"I shall have made up my mind by to-morrow, and you shall know the result."

Fervently I prayed that he might decide to carry out his design; and this probably was the wish he had taken so much pains to inspire.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KAVANAGH'S SACRIFICE.

Kavanagh, whose comprehensive forethought nothing seemed to escape, went into the house with me, and in an easy, chatty way, gave Taras an exhaustive description of the show we had been to. He must have observed my incapacity to form any idea upon the affair, and thought it prudent to relieve me from the embarrassment of answering the questions which Taras would probably put to me.

"I, too, have been looking at chrysanthemums," said Taras, when Kavanagh came to the end of his account; and he pointed to the book he had been reading.

"'The Land of the Chrysanthemum,'"

Kavanagh said, reading the title; then opening the book, and glancing at a page, he continued: "Its charms are not overrated I suppose. It must be a delightful haven for the man who seeks refuge from the storms of life—a man without ties."

"Or collars," Taras observed with a twinkle in his eye. "To be happy there the man would have to be a Jap in spirit, and discard all European habits and motives before he set foot on shore."

"I suppose a man could live there comfortably on three or four hundred a year."

"He had better not try to unless he's the sort of man who could live comfortably on twopence a day."

"I daresay you are right, old man; one must be a Jap in feeling to be happy in flying a kite or sitting down to a play in three hundred and sixty-five acts. Eating rice by the grain and drinking tea by the thimbleful must set one sighing for the fleshpots of his country.

That must explain why these enthusiasts seldom stay there longer than six months. I imagine you would not find a single European resident there, except a few missionaries and merchants whose interests compel them to that sort of exile."

They talked upon this subject until Kavanagh rose to go.

"I should like to read this book when you have done with it," he said.

"Take it with you. It's like a volume of poems—pleasant to dip into now and then rather than to wade through, and I shall be quite as happy to take my next dip in a couple of weeks as in a couple of days."

I had listened to this conversation with especial interest, conceiving that Kavanagh had a particular purpose in making inquiries about this distant country.

"Where is that land you were speaking about to Mr. Kavanagh?" I asked Taras when we were at dinner.

"Japan? Oh, right on the other side of the world."

"Then it must be very difficult to get at."

"One must travel for weeks continuously to reach there," he said; and then he went on to gossip about the country and the ways and customs of the people with their simple, sweet, and peaceful disposition.

"I should think there are no Nihilists there," I remarked tentatively.

"No," he replied with a smile. "Happily there is no occupation for us in Japan. What suggested the idea?"

"I thought Mr. Kavanagh spoke as if he would like to go there: and he is a Nihilist, isn't he?"

"Kavanagh in Japan!" he exclaimed; and then laughed heartily.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Because the idea of Kavanagh without a rigid hat and collar and in a Japanese dress tickles me," said he; and on the back of an

envelope he hastily sketched him in a mikado dress, with a fan in one hand and a large umbrella in the other. The caricature was so grotesquely like, and yet unlike, that I myself could not refrain from laughing at it.

"Kavanagh in a sombrero and Spanish cloak is much more conceivable," he continued, sketching another portrait, which had nothing ludicrous or inharmonious in its composition. "And should he ever quit Europe—such a proceeding would require extraordinary pressure—one would expect to find him in some South American city where there was a dash of devilry, playing for high stakes, a good deal of intrigue, and the occasional use of a dress suit. But Japan! That's the very last corner of the world in which he would be looked for."

"For that reason," I said to myself with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "Kavanagh will go there."

It seemed to me that unless Kavanagh's

profession of devoted friendship for Taras were false, he must make this sacrifice of his own predilections to save him; and my rising hopes led me to credit him with sincerity and generosity and other virtues which otherwise I might have denied him. Oh! if he only carried out this design—disgracing Rudersdorf, compelling the Czar to abandon the persecution of Taras—what tranquil happiness we might enjoy! The hopeful peace and calm of this evening, after the feverish excitement of the past night, seemed to me a foretaste of that still sweeter future.

The next morning, just after lunch, Kavanagh brought back the book. He had read it through.

"When I take up a thing I am bound to go through with it to the end," he said in reply to Taras's exclamation of surprise; but a significant glance at me as he raised his eyes gave a double meaning to his words.

I left them talking about books of travel,

and, running up to my room, dressed quickly to go out. Buttoning my gloves, I returned to the living-room and told Taras that I was going into the Kennington Road.

"May I offer you a seat in my brougham?" Kavanagh asked, rising.

I accepted, and we presently went out together.

"Rudersdorf has arrived," Kavanagh said gravely when we had started.

I had to close my teeth to prevent them from chattering with the excitement that shook me.

"I saw him this morning," he continued in the same sombre tone.

"Have you settled what you will do?" I asked, stammering at each word.

"Oh, I had decided that question before I saw him. It must be done. There is no other way out of the difficulty."

He laughed bitterly as some expression of thankfulness and gratitude escaped me.

"You do not regret it? It is a good thing to be able to save a friend," I said.

"Yes; but one may be excused for feeling badly used in having to escape even the lesser of two evils. However," he added in a lighter tone, "if it is to be done it is well to do it with a good grace. Still, it's a big wrench—tearing oneself away for ever from friends and everything that has made life pleasant."

"Yes," said I, putting myself in his place; "it is a terrible sacrifice to give up all you love like that. I'm afraid I have not thought enough of your loss."

"Never mind that, my dear girl. For Heaven's sake don't cry!"

A tear of sympathy had started to my eyes as I thought of the grief it would be to leave Taras even to save him.

"Come; there's no time for sentiment. We have to act. You will have to help me in this affair."

"I am glad of that. What am I to do?"

"At present the sole object you have to regard is to keep Taras entirely ignorant of what is going on."

"Is that all?" I asked with disappointment.

"For the present, yes. The time to do more will come soon enough—soon enough, you will find."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST CHANCE.

"We must take every precaution to prevent the possibility of failure," said Kavanagh. "It is our only chance."

"Have you thought out how it is to be done?" I asked.

Overcoming the hesitation which kept him silent for a few moments, he said, "I think I may safely trust you. You are not likely to be imprudent or careless."

"Careless! how can I be? Isn't the life of Taras at stake?"

"Indeed it is. The slightest rumour of suspicion would ruin our hopes; and, remember, it is not more important to deceive Rudersdorf

than it is to keep Taras in the dark. If he dreamt of our intention to get Gordon seized in his place, he would be the first to telegraph to the Minister of Police and warn him against the deception that might possibly be put upon Rudersdorf."

"Yes, he would never suffer Gordon to take his place. He shall learn nothing from me."

"My plan is a simple one; it is merely to lure Gordon to the 'Mariner's Joy' and serve him as Taras was served—of course employing other men than those who made Taras prisoner. The less complicated the scheme is the better," he pursued, seeing possibly the reluctance I felt. "If you can suggest anything simpler I shall be only too happy to adopt it, providing, of course, that it is equally practicable."

"Wouldn't it be easier to give him a sleeping draught and carry him off in the same way as you did Taras?"

He shook his head dubiously and said—

"It might be easier, simpler, and better in

one respect, but we must look beyond the mere act of getting Gordon away. Now what would the consequences be? Gordon would be missed, and inquiries made. It would be found that the same accident had befallen him that overcame Taras a short time before, and that he had last been seen with me. What account could I give that would satisfy his friends and Taras? Slow as Taras is to suspect, his doubts must be raised by the peculiar coincidence, and——"

"No, no, that wouldn't do," I said, interrupting him; "your plan is better—the first; how are you going to get George Gordon to the 'Joy'?"

"When the time comes you must take him there on the pretence that Taras has been seized, and may be found in the cellar where he was confined before. There is nothing to fear," he said, again noticing my hesitation. "I shall be there to see that no harm befalls you."

"I wasn't thinking of that; I'm willing to face anything for his sake—you ought to know

that. What I'm doubtful about is whether Gordon will just do exactly what we want him to do. Supposing he will not believe my story, thinks I have made a mistake, and insists upon looking for him first of all at his club or elsewhere; suppose he chooses to take a man with him to the 'Joy' instead of me, or somebody else as well, how are we to keep Taras in the dark then?"

"That is a serious consideration; such a possibility did not occur to me. It shows again that two heads are better than one. Yes, all that you suggest is quite likely to happen—unless," he reflected a while—"unless we prepare him beforehand for the event. Without letting him know anything of our intentions he might be warned that Taras is in danger, and that his help may be needed at any moment. I think I see my way to doing that. The possibility of his taking some one with you to help in the rescue can be obviated by your fetching him in this carriage. I must think this out in detail.

Mind, if he speaks to you on the subject, you must profess complete ignorance—you understand?"

"Yes."

"I myself shall come as seldom as possible to Lambeth, in order to avoid any suspicion of collusion. If any simpler scheme presents itself I will let you know, and of course you shall have timely and definite instructions when the moment comes for action."

"That won't be long, will it?"

"No longer than is absolutely necessary. You must have patience meanwhile. A single false step would ruin everything. Undue haste would awake Rudersdorf's suspicion, and then," he added with a sigh, "there are my own affairs to wind up: property to be realised, belongings to dispose of, friends to be hunted up—for the last time possibly." He was silent a while, and then, breaking away from reflections that seemed to shake his purpose, he concluded: "I shall bolt the very day that Gordon is taken on board

the *Volga;* it will be thought then that he and I have simply run away together for a holiday—till the truth is known."

This reference to the sacrifice he was about to make silenced me and precluded further discussion. Happiness made me selfish—the joy of saving Taras dulling my sense of pity for Kavanagh. I felt that I was heartless—that I ought to suffer more than a momentary pang of sympathy for the man who was giving up so much for the sake of his friend. But even this consciousness failed to damp the joyful spirits with which I hastened back to Taras. Nay, I did not even feel the admiration for Kavanagh which his heroic sacrifice should have stirred up in my breast. Either some lingering feeling of dislike dulled my senses to his merits, or there was no room in my heart for any one but Taras. I felt great confidence in the success of Kavanagh's scheme. It was evident that he would have succeeded before but for my intervention: now every effort that I made would be

to carry out his design. My only fear was that consideration of his own interests would change his purpose; but proof of his unshaken resolution was soon forthcoming.

An unusual expression of gravity in Gordon's face when he called the next morning told me that he had already received some intimation of Taras's danger.

"Mademoiselle," said he almost as soon as Mère Lucas had closed the door on us, "do you think you could understand me if I spoke in English?"

"I daresay I can," I replied.

"You can answer in French, you know, which is a lot easier to understand than to speak. If you can't follow me we'll give it up and try the other way; but the fact is, I have something of a delicate nature to tell you, and I'm so confoundedly bad at French that it's doubtful if I could explain it just as I want to, you know, in that language."

I agreed to this proposal, and he, after

pulling his moustache in silent meditation for a minute, said, with an uneasy laugh—

"To tell you the truth, mademoiselle, now that I toe the line, so to speak, I find it's not such an easy matter to tell you in English as I thought it would be. Well, the long and short of it is, I heard something last night that has made me feel deucedly anxious and uncomfortable, and though I should be awfully sorry to alarm you, I think you ought to be made acquainted with the facts of the case. That is Barry Kavanagh's opinion also, and he's a man of the world, you know, and a deuced long-headed fellow."

"If it concerns our friend Taras," I said in a low voice, "I beg you not to hesitate in telling me anything you have heard."

"It does concern him," he replied, dropping his voice also. "Perhaps you know that he is in danger of being seized by the secret police of Russia?"

"I have every reason to know it. Two

attempts have already been made to take him away."

"Kavanagh told me that, and also that in each case the attempt was knocked on the head, so to speak, by you. That doesn't astonish me at all, for anyone can see that you are not an ordinary sort of young lady, and then you Russians take such an active part in this awful political struggle. I was perfectly convinced that you had escaped from Siberia, or done something equally remarkable, the very first time I had the pleasure of seeing you. Of course, mademoiselle," he hastened to say, "I understand, by the reticence of our friend Taras, with regard to an obligation which he must wish to openly acknowledge, that you have reasons for desiring your part in the affair to be kept secret, and you may, therefore, rely upon my regarding Kavanagh's communication as strictly confidential."

"That goes without saying. Tell me what you have heard about the police."

"You have heard, perhaps, of an agent named Rudersdorf?"

"Rudersdorf! I know him only too well. Is he in London?"

"Kavanagh saw him yesterday at the door of the Russian Embassy. He attaches the greatest significance to his presence in London."

"And not without reason."

"You, too, think that it indicates danger to Taras?"

"I am sure of it."

"Do you think Taras ought to be warned?"

"What good would that do? If you told Taras that Rudersdorf was waiting out there on the bridge to shoot him, Taras, without a second thought, would go out on the bridge to face him."

Gordon nodded assent.

"I think that's what I should do myself," he said.

"But that is not what we want Taras to do."

"No, we want to keep him out of danger as much as possible. But, as Kavanagh pointed out, anything that we can do must be done without his knowledge. If he knew it he would resent anything like interference on our part. That's characteristic of him. A man's pride rebels against being looked after and taken care of by his friends."

"I am afraid we should do more harm than good."

"Unsettling him to no good purpose, and perhaps spoiling his work. I am of Kavanagh's opinion, that we had better wait, you know, until we have some more definite knowledge as to Rudersdorf's purpose. Kavanagh's gone this morning to hunt up a detective or two. As a rule, they don't do much, detectives—except in fiction—but the mere fact of finding himself dogged by a couple of men may hinder this confounded agent, if they can only get on his track. I fear I can't do much, but you may be sure, mademoiselle, that I shall

be only too happy to aid you in any possible way."

"All that we can do is to be on the alert for anything that occurs. I can only watch as I have watched before."

"You will let me know if you see anything, won't you? I'll drop in pretty frequently, and should you want help at any time when I'm not in the works or at the office, you will find me at my diggings at the Adelphi Terrace. I shall look in every night until I feel sure that I may not be wanted."

Just then we heard Taras coming down the passage. He entered the room before Gordon could beat a retreat or even assume the natural attitude of a visitor. A worse actor never existed than this honest, simple fellow, nor one less capable of concealing anything; and his clumsy efforts to appear unconstrained and easy gave him such an air of guilty embarrassment that any one less acquainted with his amiable character than Taras would have certainly suspected him

of some wrongdoing. An irresistible smile broke over Taras's face as he shook hands with his friend and congratulated him on looking so rosy and well. It was a trying time for poor Gordon, but fear of the ordeal did not deter him from keeping his word. Every day he called in, and always at an hour when Taras was working in his atelier.

Mère Lucas was delighted. She saw in these visits the realisation of her hopes, and gave me to understand, by many encouraging winks and sly observations, that she knew perfectly well Gordon came only to make love to me.

"One can read his face like a printed book," she said to me one day. "He is as anxious as can be when he asks if monsieur is in his studio, and his blushes are beautiful to see when I tell him you are alone. Then he always stumbles over the mat when he comes in the room, which is a sure sign that a young man is in love. And he looks so ashamed of himself when he enters that any one can guess his intentions.

Though why he should blush on that account I cannot tell, for he is as honest as the day, and one ought to feel proud in being received by such a good and pretty young lady as mademoiselle."

It seemed to me that Taras put the same construction on these visits and the awkward behaviour of Gordon. He gave me no verbal hint of this belief; I drew my conclusions rather from his reserve on the subject. Always he spoke of Gordon with warm affection, and yet I fancied with a certain tinge of pain which I was then quite at a loss to account for.

I myself may unconsciously have strengthened this illusion by my own behaviour. It needed greater art than I was mistress of to seem open and candid with that secret in my breast—to conceal the thoughts that agitated my mind night and day and the varying emotions that sprang from them. My heart was continually fluctuating between lively hope and dull fear. A sword hung over the head

of Taras: how could I regard it with indifference, or hide my deep anxiety, and seem natural?

But in addition to these symptoms of embarrassment and hidden feeling, Gordon's repeated visits and their lengthening duration were suggestive of ripening attachment. "If they are not in love," Taras may very well have said to himself, "what on earth can Gordon, with his limited knowledge of French, find to talk about day after day?"

Well, following up his ingenious device for conversing freely, Gordon talked to me chiefly about Judith Bell. Had Taras known this he would have needed no stronger proof that Gordon was not in love with me or I with him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NEARING THE END.

Now that Gordon could convey his thoughts without pulling up in the middle of each sentence to find words to express them, he became much more communicative, and kindly feeling rapidly expanded into genuine friendship. He liked to talk about his sweetheart, and he found me an attentive and sympathetic listener. I wanted to know all about Judith Bell; I was eager to sound the depth of their mutual attachment and ascertain the probable outcome of this love affair. The aspect of Kavanagh's plan for kidnapping Gordon was considerably altered by its bearing upon Judith. Hitherto I had thought very lightly of the part he was to play

in the scheme for saving Taras. A forced voyage to St. Petersburg and back, even with the possibility added of a few weeks' detention as a political prisoner, was not a high price to pay for the life of a friend. It was a trifle in comparison with the sacrifice Kavanagh had to make, and it sank into insignificance beside the alternative of perpetual exile or death to Taras.

We had agreed that Gordon himself would willingly accept the part assigned him. But these arguments seemed to lose their force now that another was concerned. Knowing how I should feel the loss of Taras, I could not be indifferent to the anxiety and pain to be inflicted on Gordon's sweetheart, even though that anxiety might end so soon. The knowledge that she must suffer made me more uneasy than ever—indeed, tranquillity was impossible in a mind so harassed with fears as mine was, and my conscience was sufficiently exercised with the responsibility I had taken on myself before these scruples with regard to Judith's happiness

came to twinge it. But for all that I never wavered in the determination to play out my part. No consideration of friends or self could turn me from my purpose.

Gordon saw Kavanagh frequently, but he had little to report except that the detectives were closely watching Rudersdorf, who as yet had not left the neighbourhood of Shadwell, where he had taken lodgings. Whether this was true or not I had no means of knowing, for Kavanagh still kept away, though a week had passed since our last interview. The suspense of these days was hard to bear, but incidentally I learnt a fact from Gordon which explained and excused his postponing the final act to the last moment possible.

"Do you see Miss Bell very often?" I asked Gordon one day.

"Not half so often as I should like to, I assure you," he replied; and then, rather inconsequently, as it seemed to me, he added, "you see, she's such a brick of a girl."

"Is that any reason why you should not see her if she's engaged to you?"

"Well, that's a provisional sort of affair, you know. It all depends on the success of the pottery—hang it! though of course it's bound to succeed. You see, the old colonel has stuck all his capital into the concern; it wasn't much, to be sure, but it's all he has. Well if he gets a jolly good income out of it, Judith will be my wife; if he don't—well then"—after stroking his beard reflectively for a minute in silence—"well then we shall be married all the same, only it will be a deuce of a bother."

"I don't think I quite understand."

"It's like this, mademoiselle; I don't mind telling you, because you are the last one in the world who would betray the confidence of a friend. The fact is, poor old Bell's had a rough time of it, and through trusting one confounded kind friend, and backing bills for another, has got his finances into such a muddle that I doubt if he would have fifty pounds a year to live

upon if all his precious bonds and securities and shares were put in the market and realised. Well, you see, he don't know that, and Heaven forbid it should ever come to his ears. It shan't if I can have a hand in cooking his accounts, you may be sure. But the deuce of it is the old boy's as proud as Lucifer, and it would just break his heart if he found out one day that he was subsisting on any one's generosity—a sort of pensioner, don't you know? And—well that's how it is, don't you see?"

"No, I don't quite. How does that affect your marriage with Miss Bell?"

"Why, Judith knows how matters stand, though the colonel doesn't. You ladies are a lot sharper than we at seeing right into things. She knows that if this last venture of her poor old dad's breaks down he must learn the truth—and, well, she's got a bit of the colonel's pride in her straight back too, bless her! and she won't marry me before she is

certain that I'm not to be saddled with her father. It's confounded nonsense, of course—we're bound to marry, because we couldn't love anybody else—but I honour her for it, you know. She *is* a brick!"

"But still, if you love each other, it seems natural that you should want to see each other sometimes, even if you can't marry," I said, thinking of Taras.

"Oh, we do sometimes, but not every day—not even once a week. It isn't practicable, because, don't you know, Judith isn't exactly free. Knowing the critical state of their pecuniary resources she took an engagement as nursery governess; that will show you what a capital sort of girl she is. This is quite between you and me, for the colonel, with his awfully narrow ideas about class and that sort of thing, would be horrified at the notion of his daughter earning her living."

"But how is it kept a secret from him?"

"Oh, that's easy enough! He supposes

that she is staying at Sydenham on a visit with Mrs. Kavanagh, who is an old friend."

"Mrs. Kavanagh!" I exclaimed in astonishment.

"Mrs. Charles Kavanagh—Barry Kavanagh's sister-in-law," he explained.

"I did not know that he had any relations living in London."

"That's not a bit surprising. Kavanagh's such an awfully rum, taciturn fellow in some matters. You can never tell what he feels or thinks, or knows or does, or anything about him. I must have known him a couple of years, and with some degree of intimacy, before I discovered, and then by accident, that his mother was living."

"Is she living now?"

"Oh dear yes. She resides with the family at Sydenham. It's odd, isn't it? One would think he had no one dearer to him than Taras and me. It seems so natural to talk about people you love; and I believe Barry's a most

devoted son and brother. I know he spends a couple of days a week at Sydenham. I suppose it's the logical outcome of his confounded rationalism."

After hearing this I could not expect that Kavanagh would take the final step one moment before Rudersdorf's patience had been stretched to the utmost limit.

One morning, it must have been the 9th of November, Taras, looking at the paper, said, "There's to be a last display of fireworks at the Crystal Palace to-night; shall we go and see it?"

I acceded joyfully to the proposal.

"Then I'll knock off at lunch time," said he, going to the window and looking out. "We will take advantage of this sunny day; we may not get many more."

To my oversensitive ear there was something terribly prophetic in that phrase, and indeed there seemed to be a touch of sadness in his voice, as if some sorrowful prognostic were passing through his mind.

I looked forward to our spending the afternoon and evening together alone, but Taras, finding Gordon with me when he came down from his work, asked him to stay to lunch and go with us, doubtless thinking to add to my pleasure. Gordon accepted the invitation with vexatious alacrity. I hated him for coming between me and Taras; but my vexation wore off before we reached the palace.

I had never been there before, and the beauty of the grounds, the flowers and creeping plants in the building, and the music, charmed my senses and quite restored my temper. Gordon was particularly good-humoured and lively, and his mirth was infectious; the solemn diners and severely correct waiters seemed quite scandalised by our gaiety at dinner.

We saw the fireworks from the upper terrace. There were a great many people there. The last bouquet of rockets had been fired, and the falling splashes of colour were fading away when a voice beside me said—

"Ah, I have found you at last!" It was Kavanagh who spoke, though I did not recognise him immediately in the darkness that followed the bright flood of light.

"We saw you going down the steps," he explained as he shook hands with us; "Mrs. Charles insisted upon my pursuing you, but I lost sight of you in the crowd. We shall find them in the transept."

We made our way slowly with the throng flowing into the building. The crowd at the entrance was so great that we were separated, Kavanagh and I going in advance of Taras and Gordon. Having passed the door we waited for them to rejoin us. The babble of voices around us precluded conversation, but it struck me that Kavanagh's face wore a strained and anxious expression.

Presently Gordon came into sight alone.

"Where is Taras?" Kavanagh asked eagerly, catching him by the arm.

"Oh, coming along," replied Gordon with a

laugh; "he would stand back for some pushing cads to pass."

"Find him, for Heaven's sake! We must not lose sight of him for a moment. Rudersdorf is here!"

Gordon without a word pushed his way back through the mob, consternation in his face.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SIGNAL IS GIVEN.

"It's all right," said Kavanagh, as Gordon turned his back on us; "there is no danger."

"But if Rudersdorf is here!" I said in trepidation.

"Rudersdorf is not here. I said that as an expedient to get rid of Gordon. See—there they come. Let us go on. They cannot overtake us until we are at the top of the stairs, and I have something of the utmost importance to tell you. If I had not been lucky enough to see you to-night I must have found some means of seeing you alone to-morrow."

We turned the flight of steps. Looking down over the heads of the people we saw

Taras and Gordon at the foot. Kavanagh continued in the murmuring tone peculiar to himself, which made it almost impossible for any other than the person he addressed to catch what he said—

"The preparations are all made. We only wait now for a favourable opportunity to take the last step. That opportunity may present itself at any moment after to-night. Some time to-morrow—probably in the evening; I cannot fix the hour—or the next evening, certainly not later than the night following, the thing will be done. You must hold yourself in readiness for immediate action. All depends upon your promptitude and exactness."

"What am I to do?"

"I am about to tell you. Listen attentively, for I may not have the chance of repeating instructions. When I come to Lambeth, Taras may be with you. Now you see this ring on my finger"—as he spoke he passed his hand lightly over his moustache—"if you see it on

my left hand you will know that nothing can be done yet a while; but if it is on the little finger of the right hand—the right hand, mind—you will leave the room, the workshop, wherever you are—without excuse will be best—put on your things, and leave the house as quickly as you can. You may depend upon my fixing Taras's attention for a clear space of five or ten minutes. In front of Lambeth Church you will find my carriage. The driver will be the long, thin man you have seen before. He knows what to do. Directly you are seated he will drive you to Gordon's chambers. You will find him in his rooms, for I shall have seen him in the afternoon, and warned him that a development of Rudersdorf's plot is to be expected. Say to him: 'Taras went out before dinner and has not returned. Kavanagh says they have carried him off to Shadwell. He has gone on in a hansom. He sent me to fetch you. His carriage is outside; the driver knows where to take us. Come, for

Heaven's sake!' Now repeat what I have said."

Word for word I repeated what he had told me to say. He nodded approval and said—

"You need not study the part you have to act. Your own agitation will preclude any doubt of your sincerity."

I was about to question him as to the course to be taken after reaching Shadwell, but having reached the top of the stairs he cut me short.

"Here they are," he said. "Now when Gordon asks you what you have learnt from me, say that I saw Rudersdorf following you when you left the building, and that he may be recognised by his wearing a coat with a deep sable collar and cuffs. Warn him not to alarm Taras, and you yourself be careful, as you value his life."

Taras and Gordon overtook us as we stood before a statue which Kavanagh had stopped to criticise with the drawling manner of a man who is at a loss to find a subject for conversation.

With ready address he made some observation on sculpture which provoked discussion with Taras and enabled me to escape observation by falling in the rear with Gordon as we walked on down the half-lit alley towards the transept.

Terrified by the impending crisis, my faith in a happy issue from surrounding dangers shaken by misgivings respecting my own ability to execute the part I had undertaken, and my conscience recoiling with an undefined perception of evil from the deceit to be practised on Gordon, I could scarcely reply to the questions which Kavanagh had prepared me to expect.

"Kavanagh has frightened you," said Gordon, perceiving my agitation; "take my arm. You look faint and ill."

I took his arm, though with an inward objection, for I felt the need of support, physical as well as moral.

"Thank you; I shall feel strong again directly. There is nothing to fear."

"Of course not," said he cheerfully; "what

could they do in a crowded place like this, and with us on the look-out? I can't understand Kavanagh. He is usually so clear-headed and careful. It's altogether unlike him to strike unnecessary alarm like this. Where did he see Rudersdorf?"

"Following us—a man with a deep sable collar and cuffs."

"By George, there he is!" Gordon exclaimed under his breath, stopping abruptly at sight of a man in a fur coat on the other side of the plants screening the walk. Then going on again with a stamp of vexation, "What a confounded ass I am. That isn't sable, and there are a dozen men here in fur coats. That's a good one, isn't it, mademoiselle, to accuse Kavanagh of alarming you unnecessarily, and the next moment to commit the same fault? The fact is, we're all upset—only Kavanagh has the knack of hiding it and we haven't."

Following Taras and Kavanagh, we left the alley to cross the brightly illuminated transept.

At that minute a couple of children darted out from their ambuscade behind a group of statuary, and caught Gordon's disengaged arm. Even that startled us, and before we had recovered from the surprise a young lady came forward, who I knew must be Judith Bell before Gordon introduced us.

A more unfortunate moment for this introduction could not be imagined. Gordon, at no time remarkable for self-possession, and I naturally *gauche* and awkward from want of cultivation, were now, under the paralysing influence of fright and nervous excitement, absolutely incapable of assuming an attitude of rational composure. We must have looked like culprits discovered in a misdeed. After stammering the usual form of introduction in an unintelligible jargon of bad French and English, Gordon said—

"I'm making an awful mess of this; but to confess the truth, Judith, you have taken me by surprise."

"That scarcely needs confession," replied Judith; "you did not think to ask Mr. Kavanagh if I were here?"

"Oh, I remember, he said you were here," stammered the honest fellow; "but my thoughts have been so absorbed by something else. Hang it! I don't mean that."

"It would be quite excusable if you did," she retorted, with a slight inclination of her head as she turned to address me.

There was something painfully ludicrous in the embarrassment of this big, awkward man —something which tinged the expression of Judith's pretty face with sadness as well as mirth. He submitted to be dragged away by the children to the group where Taras was chatting with Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kavanagh.

"I have been a long while anxious to make your acquaintance," said Judith in good French as we slowly walked towards the party. "I have heard so much about you from Mr. Gordon

—so much that if I were not quite sure of his constancy I might feel jealous."

I could not find a word to say in reply to this advance—not one. I was not yet an adept in hypocrisy, and my tongue obstinately refused to make any profession of friendship for this girl whose happiness might be turned to misery and grief by my act. What if this scheme to save Taras should prove fatal to Gordon! There was nothing impossible, nothing improbable in the fear. Rudersdorf might disregard his instructions to respect the safety of his captive. Resistance on Gordon's part would justify him in gratifying his lust for blood; and it was hardly to be expected that Gordon would submit to forcible arrest without a struggle. With these thoughts, and the reflections and self-questioning that sprang from them harrowing my mind, I was hardly conscious of my present surroundings, or they made such slight impressions on my senses that I cannot now recall them distinctly. Judith spoke to me

again. I was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kavanagh, but what was said, how I behaved, is lost to me now like the detail of a long-past dream. I only remember looking at Judith Bell, fascinated by her prettiness and picturing the change in that bright face which would come if Gordon fell.

I must have appeared incomprehensibly odd and ill-mannered, or exceedingly stupid, to her and the Kavanaghs; for after a vain attempt to engage me in conversation they abandoned me to Gordon, who, gauging my feelings by his own, stuck to me loyally. The strangeness of my behaviour did not escape the notice of Taras. More than once on our way home I found him regarding me with curious interest from his corner in the compartment, and in saying "Good-night" there was a coldness in his voice and manner that chilled my heart.

Doubtless he believed Gordon guilty of inconstancy to Judith Bell and suspected me of being party to his treachery.

"What does it matter?" I exclaimed as I threw myself on my bed. "If Taras is saved, that is everything. I would sacrifice myself and the whole world for him."

My physical strength was not proof against the effect of mental tension and anxiety. Till then I had scarcely known what sickness was, but the next day I felt wretchedly ill, from time to time being seized with hot and cold fits of fever, accompanied with violent trembling and a sense of suffocation that beaded my face with perspiration. I could eat nothing; the very sight of food was repulsive to me. I prayed that Kavanagh might come to end this torture of suspense and inaction. I wanted movement, exercise—something to take me out into the fresh air, where I might feel the rain beat upon my face. But, just because it did rain, Taras refrained from taking me out. My condition, indeed, suggested rather warmth and repose. Seeing that I was ill, he begged me to go to my room; but I dared not do that, for at any

moment Kavanagh might come and give me the signal to do my work. Moreover the peril in which I stood—for I was not blind to the possibility that Rudersdorf might take my life as well as Gordon's if it were necessary to the secret accomplishment of his plans—made every moment precious of the time that was left to me to be with Taras.

"Let me stay up," I pleaded, when he begged me for the second time to go. "I—I want to be with you the whole evening—as long as I can." And then, catching his hand by an irresistible impulse, I added, with the tears springing in my eyes, "Oh, if you knew how happy I am now you wouldn't ask me to leave you."

"Will you tell me all about it?" he asked, gently covering my hand with his for a moment.

I shook my head, drawing back in affright from the treacherous ground on which my weakness had led me.

"No, no," I said. "Oh, do not ask me any questions. One day you will know all. See, I cannot talk. It is too much. Let me sit here quietly by you, while you smoke your pipe and read just the same as ever."

If he had not before suspected it he could have no doubt now that I was passing through some great crisis; but with that generous consideration which distinguished him from other men, he made no attempt to sound my thoughts or discover the secret in my heart. He did what I desired when he had wheeled the big chair round and seated me comfortably in it—lighting his pipe and taking a book, from which he now and then read such passages as he thought might amuse me. At the usual hour he went up to his room, and I to mine. The blow was not to be struck that night.

The respite gave me a feeling of relief, with a long night of forgetfulness, and in the morning I awoke refreshed and stronger in every way.

I expected to see Gordon that morning, but he did not come. While we were at lunch a clerk came round from the pottery to ask if he was with us, showing that he had not put in an appearance there. Taras made no comment, but I saw him glance at me as the inquiry was being made. I kept my eyes down, that I might not betray what was in my mind. There was significance in Gordon's absence which was obvious enough to me: Kavanagh had warned him to hold himself in readiness, and he was staying at his chambers for the call which I was now certain would soon be made.

Nothing occurred during the afternoon; but we had scarcely finished dinner when Kavanagh's light knock at the door caused my heart to leap. The next minute he entered the room. His hands were gloved.

I sat in choking suspense as, in compliance with Taras's invitation, he seated himself and slowly unbuttoned his gloves, talking airily about some topic of the day as he leant back in

his chair, one leg crossed upon his knee and his elbows resting on the arms of the chair, so as to place his hands well in my view. He slowly drew off the left glove; the ring was not on the finger of that hand—not where he was to have worn it if nothing could be done. But I waited for a more decisive proof: the signal which was to bid me act.

Slowly he drew the glove from his right hand: the ring was on that finger, and as he nicely folded the gloves on his knee, passing the hand with the glittering ring over them, he cast a swift glance at me to make sure that the signal was understood.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WE START FOR THE "MARINER'S JOY."

I LEFT the room as Taras was opening a folded document which Kavanagh had begged him to read. Swiftly I ran to my room and put on the things I had laid out ready to my hand. At the head of the stairs I paused to assure myself that the way was clear. The muffled sound of Mère Lucas's voice humming in the kitchen, and of Taras reading aloud, showed that the doors were closed. I ran down noiselessly, opened the street door, closed it softly after me, and passed the light that streamed through the Venetian blinds of the living-room.

The rain of the day before had been followed by a thick woolly mist that dimmed the feeble

light of the gas lamps, and shrouded in obscurity every object beyond the radius of a few yards; and it was not until I had crossed the Lambeth Road that I perceived Kavanagh's carriage drawn up by the pavement before the church. The driver stood on the kerb; the light of the carriage lamp shone on his long, gaunt visage, and I recognised the man at once. He knew me also, for he touched his hat as I drew near, and briskly opened the door.

"You know where to go?" I asked as I stepped in.

"Adelphi Terrace, miss, first of all," he replied.

Then, as I nodded, he shut the door, stepped up to his seat, and started off at a sharp pace.

In less than a quarter of an hour we reached the terrace; the man sprang down and opened the door. I stepped out, and pushing open the swing door of Grandison Chambers, entered the hall. There were two staircases—one on the right; the other on the left. While I stood in

hesitation, doubtful which flight to take, the hall porter stepped forward with a jerk of his head and an obsequious—

"Beg pardon, miss. Any information I can give you?"

"Mr. George Gordon—where are his rooms?"

"Left flight, miss; second floor; name on the door."

Gordon, who had heard the wheels of the brougham, was on the landing above.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously, running down to meet me.

I had repeated Kavanagh's instructions too frequently to forget them, and I had not overlooked the necessity of translating the phrases into French, to avert suspicion.

"Taras went out before dinner and has not returned. Kavanagh says they have carried him off to Shadwell. He has gone on in a hansom. He sent me to fetch you. His carriage is outside; the driver knows where to take us——"

"My dear girl," he interrupted, "there is

no necessity for you to go. Better stay out of this; there's sure to be a scrimmage."

"The greater reason for going. I will go alone rather than be left behind."

"That'll never do. All right, mademoiselle. Pluck's everything. Wait a moment."

Saying this he ran upstairs, taking the steps two at a time, rushed into his rooms, and a minute after came out with his hat on, an ulster over his arm, and a stout stick in his hand. He banged the door after him, rejoined me, and, slipping his arm through mine to support me, led me down to the hall. The officious porter again stepped forward as if he had something to say, but Gordon brushed past him impatiently and took me to the carriage.

"All right!" he called, wedging himself in as soon as I was seated, and before the door was closed the carriage started off.

As Kavanagh had foreseen, there was no necessity for any pretence on my part. I shook from head to foot with excitement.

"It's all right, mademoiselle," said Gordon cheerfully, slipping my arm through his and nudging it to his side. "We shall pull through, you see. Kavanagh has his wits about him. I'd back him against all the police Russia can send over here. He didn't give you any other information?"

"None. Those words were all he spoke."

"Enough too. He warned me last night. That fellow Rudersdorf was hanging about Lambeth all yesterday. But it seems Taras never left the house."

"It rained so heavily."

"Well, I'm glad it's brought to the finish any how. Kavanagh intends to get the affair into the papers, and so prevent any repetition of this confounded persecution."

I asked myself why he had not done this before, if the publication could have that effect.

"Don't you bother yourself about the safety of Taras—that's all right," continued Gordon.

"Kavanagh has everything in readiness—leave him alone for that. He has only been waiting for the Russian police to take a decisive step. He had telegrams written out last night for despatch to members in the House, the Russian Ambassador, the Home Office, the police—every one whose services can be called into requisition—and those messages are flashing out in all directions at this moment like sparks from an anvil, you may depend upon it. Trust Kavanagh—that's my motto. It's a moral impossibility, with such precautions as he has taken, for Taras to be taken out of the country."

Was Gordon deceived, or had Kavanagh really this power? If he had the power, why had he not already used it? I was too ignorant to answer these questions, and I could only accept Gordon's motto—Trust Kavanagh.

"The only danger is that we may have a bit of a turn-up with these rascals, but I don't fear much from that. In fact, so far as I am concerned, I only hope I may have the chance of

showing them what sort of a fighter an Englishman is. I'm just itching for a regular good rough-and-tumble scrimmage. Only, for Heaven's sake, mademoiselle, do try and keep out of the field, or I am done. I shall be thinking of you instead of devoting my attention to these blackguards."

Thrusting his head out of the window, he called to the driver—

"You know where you are to go?"

"All right, sir. We are to meet the governor at Sandy's Walk; and if he's not there we're to cross the river to the 'Mariner's Joy.'"

"Do you know all these places?"

"Ought to, sir. Born in Rotherhithe, and served four years in the Thames Police patrolling the Pool."

As we penetrated the low-lying district beyond Southwark Park the fog grew thicker, the darkness more intense.

"It's to be hoped we shall meet them on this side of the river," Gordon observed, "for

we shall find it difficult to cross in such darkness as this."

I made no reply, knowing that if we were to cross Kavanagh had provided the means.

The streets were absolutely empty, so that the driver was able to rattle along at a good speed in spite of the darkness which, in the back streets through which we passed, was unrelieved by any light save the dull gleam of an occasional street lamp.

There was a resinous smell of pine wood. On one side of the road the light fell upon stacks of timber; on the other a ship's spars, projecting over the tarred palings, were thrown into relief by the glimmering lamp beyond. We were running down by the Baltic Dock. The driver shortened his pace to turn a corner, then pulled up under a lamp that stuck out from a high brick wall.

The driver whistled as he sprang down from the box. Grasping his stick, Gordon opened the door and stepped out. I crouched back in

my corner of the carriage, setting my teeth, holding my breath in expectation of the coming catastrophe. The driver had given the signal; it only remained for the accomplices to spring out of the darkness and overpower Gordon.

But no one appeared. The driver whistled again, looking round him in perplexity.

"I don't understand it," he said, after waiting a moment for some sound to break the silence. "The governor told me I should find him here —or some one else."

"You are sure this is the place?" Gordon asked.

"Certain. There's the old boat," nodding at an upturned boat hard by on the foreshore; "and there's the beershop," nodding to a glimmer of light across the waste space opposite the wall. "He must be down by the water. Wait here half a minute, sir."

With these words he ran off along the foreshore, and in a minute was lost to sight in the fog.

"Kavanagh must have crossed the river," said Gordon, "and the person he promised to station here to meet us has evidently yielded to the temptation of that beershop. That's much more probable than that he should go down to the water. You won't mind being left alone for a minute or two?"

"No, no—I am not afraid."

"I'll try the beershop. If Kavanagh's man is not there I may find some one who will take me across."

He hurried across the open space, and I saw his figure against the light as he entered the house by a swing door.

There was a moment of intense silence, and then I heard a long, distant whistle in the direction taken by the driver.

My eyes were fixed upon the beershop. The thickness of the night and the distance prevented my making it out clearly, but it seemed to me that there were two doors to it, one on each side of the front, with its two splashes of gas-light,

and this was presently proved to be the case by a man slipping out on the other side to that entered by Gordon. Another and another followed, all with swift stealth. Outside they stood together for a moment, looking gigantic in the fog; then, as the driver whistled again from the shore, they started off at a run towards the water side. Probably knowing that I must be in the carriage, they kept as far from it as possible; nevertheless, I saw the three phantom figures file past and disappear into the darker distance.

A few minutes elapsed, and Gordon came quickly from the beershop, followed by a man who carried a lantern.

"I've found a man to take us over; he knows the 'Mariner's Joy,'" said Gordon, as he joined me.

"Know the 'Joy,' ah!" chimed in the old waterman with a grin; "I'll get ye across somehow, though I'll have to kinder feel my way, I reckin, in this here fog."

Just then the driver came running up with a man.

"Governor's gone over to the 'Mariner's Joy,' sir," said he: "left this party to row you across."

"I can do without him," said Gordon; "I've found another man to do that job."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CAPTURED.

The long-visaged driver expostulated.

"Mr. Kavanagh engaged this man, sir," said he; "and he'd a been here, only he'd just gone down to see that his boat was all right."

"That's a lie!" cried the waterman Gordon had found. "Why, him and his mates was in the 'Dog and Duck' when this gent came in, and he'd a seed him if he'd gone in the jug department 'stead of the bar side. 'Sides, who are you?" he added combatively, holding his lantern in the other's face. "You ain't no licensed waterman—you ain't nobody of these parts. Why, you ain't nothin' but a bloomin'

furriner, as can't ast for a drop o' beer in plain English!"

"Anyhow," said Gordon decisively, "I shall take the man I've engaged. He's more likely to get through this fog than a man who doesn't know the river well;" and turning to me, he would have persuaded me to return to the carriage and go no farther; but I resolutely refused to accede to this proposal, feeling that the least I could do was to stand by him to the last.

"You will wait here till we return," said Gordon to the driver, as he gave me his arm.

The man, evidently disconcerted by the unlooked-for turn of affairs, responded with a sullen nod. I looked round for the confederate, but he had disappeared.

The waterman, carrying the lantern, descended to the water's edge with a swinging gait, and we followed at his heels. Then he left us to fetch his boat. I disengaged my hand from Gordon's arm that he might be free to defend himself in case of attack—my

reason being swayed by conflicting feelings. Anything might happen: I knew not what. Would these men, baulked in the design to get Gordon into their boat, attempt to seize him now? It was possible; but it seemed to me more probable that, in view of an alarm being raised by the waterman, they would follow us to Ferryboat Stairs, and make the attempt nearer to the "Joy," where they might have the assistance of Putty or any other agents employed in the affair. Nevertheless, every sense was on the alert to catch a sign of movement in the still darkness that surrounded us.

The lantern bobbed up and down as the waterman scrambled from boat to boat until at length he reached his wherry, and pulled in to the shore. We got into the boat and seated ourselves in the stern. The waterman set the lantern at our feet and pushed off.

"The light ain't no manner o' good to me," he explained; "I've got to feel my way acrost. The tide's a runnin' out about three quarters,

and I shall know by the wash of it pretty well whether my boat's right for the 'Joy.'"

"Not much danger of being fouled by anything to-night," Gordon remarked.

"No, sir; there ain't nothin' but the police boat moving to-night, and no craft lying in the Pool betwixt this and Doggets's Crick."

Nevertheless, before we had gone a couple of yards we ran into something—what it was could not be discovered, for by the time the waterman had lifted up the lantern nothing could be seen either ahead or alongside of us.

"I lay it's them dangnation furriners a foulin' us out of spite. If it had been a Englishman he'd a swore at us like a man."

He replaced the lantern and took the oars again. For some time he pulled in silence; then after a pause he growled out some particularly strong words in an undertone, and pulled with one oar only. The muttering ceased, and he laid himself to both oars with redoubled vigour. Presently he paused again, and with

another outburst of forcible expressions tugged at one oar viciously. After a third repetition of this singular behaviour he said, in reply to Gordon's question :—

"'What's the matter?' master; why this is the most myster'us thing ever I knowed. I keeps on a-draggin' and a-draggin' of her up, and it 'pears like as if she kep on a-goin' down: I can't get any way on her any hows. And we ought to be right over by this time. You don't see ne'er a glimmer of light, do you?"

"It's as black as the deuce all round."

"Well, we're bound to get the way on her now, if ebbs is ebbs," he muttered as he laboured at the single oar. Then, after pulling in silence for a minute or two—"Mister, it don't seem to you like as if you heerd anything but my oar a-goin', do it?"

"No."

"That's a good 'un too. Bother me if I don't think I can smell that taller ship a layin' off Doggets's Crick. Cuss me if it ain't taller

too. Here, look at this," he cried suddenly, after leaning over the side and dipping his hand in the water; "we're goin' down quicker than the tide."

He caught up the lantern, and casting its light into the fore part of the boat, he added, with a running accompaniment of expletives—

"If I didn't think so! It's them underhanded furriners playin' this trick on us. They're got a line on us a-towin' us down."

Setting down the lantern, he scrambled forward to disengage the grapnel by which we were being towed; but before he had time to accomplish this, the boat in front backed, struck our bow, and ground down alongside us. The feeble glimmer of the lantern was sufficient to reveal some dusky object bearing down upon us, a hand laid on the side of our boat, and another stretched out to seize the lantern, the figure of the waterman kneeling on the thwart, and his face turned in exasperation towards the offensive "furriner." Then an oar swept down

and struck him on the head, a man from the other boat bundled over the side into ours, the lantern was snatched up and dropped into the water, and we were left in utter darkness.

The waterman had fallen over with a grunt, stunned, and now lay quiet enough in the bottom of the boat; all we heard was a murmured command and the splash of oars in front of us.

Gordon had started to his feet at the moment the waterman fell, shouting a hasty demand for an explanation; but he got no answer, and the extinguishing of the light rendered him powerless, and his chief concern was to assure me that no harm could come to me. The whole affair was inexplicable to him, not knowing that the object of this attack was to take him prisoner. I myself could not see how it was to end, for I still thought that Gordon was to be taken to the "Mariner's Joy."

A whistle was blown in the boat that towed us, and another whistle, seemingly at no great

distance, immediately replied. I concluded that this signal was made from the shore, and a faint speck in the darkness led me to think that we were nearing Ferryboat Stairs. But as we approached it the light took a reddish glare, not to be mistaken for the light of a gas lamp. The whistle was blown again, and replied to as before; only this time it sounded quite near, and at the same time a white light began to descend from the level of the red.

"This is the oddest thing in the world," said Gordon in a tone of perplexity. "That must be a ship's light in front of us, and the lantern is evidently coming down the side."

Then I understood the position of affairs. Gordon was to be taken on board the Russian vessel, and not to the "Mariner's Joy," as Kavanagh had intended.

In a few minutes we were drawn alongside the dark hull of the steamer. On the little platform at the foot of the side steps an officer in a long cloak was standing with a bright bull's-

eye lantern; the light dazzled me when he turned it on our faces. The man who had scrambled into our boat drew us close to the platform and held us in that position.

The officer raised his hat and said in Russian—

"Will the Prince Taras Borgensky be kind enough to step on board?" I knew enough of the language to understand that.

"What does he say, mademoiselle?" asked Gordon.

My heart sickened for an instant, but summoning up courage I replied—

"He says that Taras is on board, and wishes to see us."

"Great Heaven!" Gordon exclaimed, rising; "I see how it is now. They've got poor old Taras. I'm afraid it's too late for us to help him, but we must go up and see."

"Here, where am I?" growled the waterman from the bottom of the boat. "What's all this here?"

CHAPTER XXX.

A TRAP.

The *Volga* was already coaling up. I heard the clank of furnace doors and the scraping of shovels as we passed the engine room. The officer who had received us led the way to the deck cabin, a couple of men following close at our heels.

The cabin was well lit; an elderly, sharp-visaged man, in a close-fitting official costume, was seated at the table in the middle, with writing materials and a pile of documents before him; he rose, removing his cap as we entered. The officer placed chairs for us near the table, and, begging us to be seated, unbuttoned his overcoat. As he threw it open I observed that

he wore a belt with a pistol holster attached to it, the flap unbuttoned.

I sat down, faint with emotion, now that my part was played; but Gordon remained standing, his brows bent, his countenance overcast with pain, believing that Taras had been taken prisoner. Again the officer, speaking in Russian, begged him to take a seat. Gordon turned to me; I dropped my head, ashamed to meet his eyes. "I don't know what he says, but I suppose he wants me to sit down," said he. "Will you tell him, mademoiselle, that we have come to see Taras, and that's all we want?"

I made no reply, but remained silent with downcast eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said with earnest solicitude; "I forgot that you—that this blow must naturally fall heavy upon you. You are ill?"

I shook my head.

Once more the courteous official offered a

chair, and Gordon refusing it with a curt "No, thanks!" he shrugged his shoulders, and seating himself at the head of the table, took up a paper, and began to read from it in Russian. Gordon stopped him in the first sentence.

"If you are reading that paper for my benefit," said he, "allow me to tell you that you are wasting your time. I don't understand a word of Russian."

The old gentleman who had seated himself on the left hand of the officer, leaned forward, and speaking for the first time said, in fairly good English, and with a trace of sarcasm in his bland smile—

"Surely the prince has not been expatriated so long as to forget his native tongue?"

"I'm not a prince, and my native tongue is English," Gordon asserted stoutly.

"Ah! I understand," the old gentleman responded with the same ironical blandness. "You wish to plead mistaken identity."

"I don't know what you mean. I have

come on board to see Taras—Prince Borgensky —at his request."

"Pardon me, I was at the head of the stairs when Count Rudersdorf invited the prince—addressing you, of course, in the third person—to come on board."

At the name of Rudersdorf I lifted my head in surprise to look at the officer. Was this the relentless enemy, the "bloodhound" that Kavanagh had gone to such lengths to outwit—this polite, middle-aged, not unmerciful, certainly not ferocious-looking man?

"What on earth does this mean?" asked Gordon, turning to me. Then getting no response, he addressed the officer, "Will you answer me one question, please. Is Taras on board this vessel?"

"If you are not Taras, he certainly is not," was the direct reply.

"Then I am not Taras; there is no necessity to stay here any longer."

He turned as if to go. In that instant

Rudersdorf touched a gong and slipped his hand into the holster. Almost simultaneously the two burly fellows who had followed us to the cabin stepped in and stationed themselves before the door, each armed with a revolver. Gordon stopped abruptly.

"Pardon me," said the elderly gentleman, as if nothing had happened to break the thread of the discussion, "there is a necessity to stay. We have a warrant for the arrest of Prince Borgensky, which Count Rudersdorf will proceed to read to you if you choose to hear it, and until you can give satisfactory proof that you are not Taras Borgensky, you must consider yourself a prisoner. Of course," he continued with a shrug and a smile, "I need not point out to you that resistance is perfectly useless and may be fatal."

"My name is George Gordon. I can give you my card."

With a deprecatory movement of his head the old gentleman said—

"We are quite aware that you have adopted

that name, and also that you have lately been living at Grandison Chambers, Adelphi Terrace. The count has been watching you closely for some time. Here is an accurate description of your person if you would like to see it. We have taken the utmost pains to assure ourselves of your identity before taking this important step, you may be sure."

"Hang it! If you will not believe my word, what proof can I give you?"

"The simplest in the world—show us your papers."

"Papers?"

With a smile as if at Gordon's affected ignorance, the old gentleman drew from his pocket a well-worn document, and showing it, said—

"The papers which everyone is compelled by police regulations to carry."

"In England, sir," said Gordon fiercely, "that humiliation is only put upon those who merit it by their crimes."

"Do you wish me to believe that an Englishman is not obliged to produce papers of identification at the request of the police?"

"Not unless he is a ticket-of-leave man."

The old gentleman in complete astonishment communicated this information to Rudersdorf, who shook his head with an incredulous smile.

"This young lady will tell you that I am not Taras," said Gordon.

"We cannot expect any young lady to incriminate her friend. We are very well acquainted with Mademoiselle Aura Soltikoff. She has saved you thrice from apprehension, but she will not succeed a fourth time: at any rate, not by such simple means as you suggest."

"Will the evidence of another friend convince you?"

"Undoubtedly, if the friend is reliable."

"You seem to be pretty well informed upon some points," said Gordon after a few moments' reflection. "Perhaps you know a gentleman named Kavanagh?"

"Perfectly well."

"You will accept his evidence?"

"Without hesitation."

"Very well, then," said Gordon triumphantly; "I will send for him."

"Perfectly useless," said the old gentleman, despondently—"per-fect-ly. Perhaps you are not aware that Mr. Kavanagh, like myself, is the paid servant of the Czar?"

"A paid servant of the Czar!" Gordon exclaimed, overwhelmed with astonishment.

"And the most trusted Agent of his Excellency the Minister of Police."

A glimmering of the truth dawned upon Gordon, and, his sterner nature taking the ascendant, he turned fiercely upon me, and said—

"Are you, too, a servant of the Czar—a police spy?"

I bowed my head before his wrath. The old gentleman answered for me—

"Unfortunately, Madame Soltikoff is our

most determined adversary, as you should know who owe so much to her."

Gordon regarded him, and then me, in utter bewilderment. Rudersdorf took up the order of arrest, again saying a few words in Russian.

"If you have no other evidence to offer, Count Rudersdorf will proceed to read the warrant. Time presses."

"It's a farce, I tell you, reading this thing to me. You have no power to arrest me."

"The fact that you are a prisoner proves the contrary."

"That is an abuse of power for which you will be made to pay dearly. You have no authority to arrest even Taras on British territory."

"No matter where we find the Prince Borgensky, we need no higher authority to make him our prisoner than this," replied the old gentleman, pointing to the seal on the order.

"I warn you again that I am not the prince, but a British subject."

The old gentleman shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyebrows, and spoke to Rudersdorf, who gave a short, derisive laugh, and then, losing patience, replied in a few curt, peremptory sentences which my limited knowledge of Russian did not enable me to follow. But he addressed Gordon rather than his secretary.

"What does he say?" Gordon demanded with not less impatience.

"Count Rudersdorf wishes to know if you expect him to take your simple denial against the evidence of his own senses? This is not the first time you have met, and he is somewhat astonished that you do not recognise him, as no further back than this morning you passed him twice in walking up and down the Adelphi Terrace with Mr. Kavanagh."

Gordon started, and, fixing his eyes on Rudersdorf, seemed to recall his face to mind.

"And all this!" expostulated the old gentleman, raising the pile of identifying papers.

"For example," he added, picking up a photograph that had slipped out, "you would not have us believe that this is not your portrait?"

Gordon took up the photograph and regarded it in bewilderment. It was undoubtedly his own portrait, but mounted on a card with the printed name and address of a photographer in Moscow. The only explanation was that the photograph had been removed from the English mount and pasted on the Russian one. But for what purpose was still an unfathomed mystery to him.

"You perhaps deny your own handwriting?" said the old gentleman, handing a letter.

"That is not my hand. I cannot even read the character in which it is written."

"Here is one written by you in the ordinary European hand."

"That is not my writing. I can prove it. Give me a sheet of paper."

Writing material was given to him, and he wrote a couple of lines quickly.

Rudersdorf and the old gentleman examined it, and exchanged a few observations.

"The prince has altered his hand evidently," said the old gentleman in a complimentary tone; "but, as the count points out, that is a slight achievement for one whose skill of hand is known all over the world."

Gordon dashed down the pen in a rage and thrust his hands in his pockets.

A luminous idea seemed to have occurred to Rudersdorf, and a rapid dialogue ensued between him and his secretary, at the end of which the old gentleman, turning to Gordon, said—

"The count, admitting the very remote possibility of a treacherous proceeding on the part of Mr. Kavanagh, has suggested a very simple means of testing the proof of identity by handwriting."

"Well, I'm glad if he has come to his senses at last. What is it?"

"Of course, you do not pretend to ignore

the existence of such a person as the Prince Borgensky!"

"On the contrary, I'm proud to say that he is my intimate friend."

"Of course." The old gentleman nodded to Rudersdorf with a smile which indicated that this admission was a foregone conclusion on their part. "Well, sir, we propose, in order to obviate the possibility of any mistake, to delay our departure for some hours, if necessary. Naturally, being intimate with the prince, you know his address?"

"Perfectly well."

"Good. Now the count suggests that you shall write a note to him, telling him of the position in which you are placed, and asking him to send a line by the bearer in return to inform us that we have blundered, and that he is Taras. When we have his answer, we can compare the writing with the letters of his that lie before you, and if there is any resemblance between them we—well, we shall make a very

much more careful investigation of the affair before we remove you."

"I understand you," said Gordon, after a moment's reflection.

And then, seating himself at the table, he took up the pen again and wrote a few words in his great schoolboy hand.

I looked on with an awakening sense of alarm that I must attribute rather to instinct than to any process of reasoning. My suspicion was increased by detecting a furtive exchange of glances between Rudersdorf and his secretary.

"May I trouble you for an envelope?" Gordon asked, still writing.

"You will permit us to see what you have written before enclosing your letter."

"Oh, certainly," Gordon replied, stopping abruptly and handing the sheet of paper. "You will not find it particularly flattering."

The old gentleman took the note with a bow, put on his glasses, and read aloud slowly—

"DEAR OLD MAN,—Mademoiselle and I have been kidnapped and brought aboard a steamer lying somewhere in the Pool. The most astute police in the world in the person of a muddle-headed officer named Rudersdorf, aided by a particularly self-satisfied old bouncer who plays the part of clerk and interpreter, insists upon it that I am Taras, Prince Borgensky, and under this flattering illusion will certainly cart me off to Russia unless I can prove the contrary. They maintain that my handwriting is disguised; but seeing the improbability of any one assuming your name and style of writing, they agree to reconsider the advisability of violating international law upon receipt of a line or two from you which they can identify by comparison with certain specimens of your caligraphy now on the table before me. Will you, therefore, be good enough to send back a note by bearer letting them know that they have collared the wrong man and yours very——"

Here the letter broke off.

"That will do admirably," said the old gentleman, after translating it to Rudersdorf and receiving his nod of approval and a word or two of advice. "You have only to add your signature."

My heart beat violently as Gordon took the paper and wrote his name. I felt that there

was danger, yet I lacked the power to interfere—like one seized with a vertigo.

"I have added a postscript," said Gordon—

"I need not warn you, old fellow, to beware of falling into the same trap that caught me. The rascals may be more clever than they seem."

The old gentleman assented to the addition, and held out his hand to take the letter as Gordon closed the envelope.

In that instant the real danger appeared to me, and, the power of volition coming with it, I sprang to my feet.

"Wait!" I cried. "Don't let that go out of your hand. It's a trap—it's a trap!"

The old gentleman slipped his hand out quickly to take the letter. But at my cry Gordon's strong fingers had closed firmly on the paper, and the smart twitch failed to take it from him. He slipped his hand with the letter in it in his pocket, with a nod at the old gentleman which seemed to say, "No, you don't!"

"Don't you see what will happen!" I went on with vehemence—"you, who know Taras! The moment he hears that you are a prisoner, he will give himself up to set you free. They know that—these men and Kavanagh. All this is but a cunning design to make Taras a prisoner."

"You're right. Hang me if I saw that, though I suspected some snare when I wrote that P.S." Turning to Rudersdorf and his secretary, he added, "Do your worst, my crafty friends. Take me where you will, you won't get me to bait your cursed trap!"

And with that he took out the letter and tore it into fragments.

CHAPTER XXXI.

I ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE AND FAIL.

After a brief consultation with Rudersdorf, the secretary turned to Gordon.

"Admirably as you have played this little scene," he said, with his former bland irony, and a gesture extending his compliment to me, "you cannot expect us to take that exhibition as a convincing proof that you are not Prince Borgensky. We are used to this sort of thing, and not easily to be deceived. At the same time, to remove even the faintest trace of doubt, we shall be happy to facilitate to the utmost in our power every means of immediately proving your identity. If there is any reliable person with whom you wish to communicate—"

"You shan't have a line of writing from me," said Gordon; "not a scrap that can be twisted into a snare to serve your purpose."

"In that case, relying on the evidence before us and the perfect honesty of our *confrère*, Barry Kavanagh, we have only to complete formalities and remove you to Russia, where you will be dealt with in accordance with the pleasure of the Czar."

"As you please."

At a sign from the secretary, Rudersdorf again took up the paper, which he this time read through without interruption. Coming to the end he nodded to the guard at the door, who at once stepped forward and laid hands upon Gordon. He made no resistance, and without a word passed out of the cabin, apparently too absorbed in thought to take heed of immediate circumstances.

I made a movement to follow him, but Rudersdorf, who had risen and now stood by the door, interposed.

"We have not done with you yet," he said sternly. "Sit down there."

I seated myself in the chair he pushed towards me.

For a few minutes he and the old gentleman conversed in a jargon that I could not understand; then, with the same brusque manner, he addressed me again.

"*You* don't feign ignorance, I suppose?" he continued rudely. "You understand Russian?"

"Not such Russian as you two have been speaking together," I replied, speaking, as I habitually did, in French.

"Oh, if you understand French, we can get on," said he in that language. "Now, then, your name is Aura Soltikoff?"

"I never heard that name before."

"Ah! and you were not born at Kief?" he said, glancing at a paper.

"No."

"And, of course, *you* haven't got any papers?"

"No."

"The same old game," he muttered with a shrug, glancing at the old gentleman.

"And also, of course, you have not been living for nearly a year under the same roof with Prince Borgensky?"

"Yes, I have," I replied with pride.

"Oh, come! it's something to get that admission out of you. Well, having lived with him so long, you may happen to have heard something about Siberia?"

"Yes; that's the place where they strip women and flog them; where they chain prisoners like dogs, and treat them worse than any animals living."

"A good deal worse," he answered with a brutal laugh. "Flogging is not the worst thing that may happen to a woman there; but I daresay you know more about that than you care to mention. One fact, however, may have escaped your notice: no woman has ever escaped twice from Siberia. You know what I mean," he added, prompted by an admonitory word from

his secretary. "If you go there again you will never leave it—you'll die on the road or in the punishment cell. Do you understand me?"

"Who's going to Siberia?" I asked in as bold a tone as I could assume, my heart quaking at the hint.

"Who is going?" he echoed slowly. "You are if you're not prudent."

He gave time for this threat to sink into my mind by speaking to his secretary.

"Now, then," he went on, "as you value your life, answer me this truly: who is the man who has just left this cabin?"

I made no reply. The old gentleman, with a most urbane smile, intervened.

"Mademoiselle herself, by her own word and act, has raised a doubt—a very trifling doubt—whether we have captured the real Prince Borgensky or not. Of course, if he is not the prince, we dare not take either him or mademoiselle from the country. Both will be sent on shore at once if that is proved. Mademoiselle will see

that it can do her no harm, but be to her great advantage, to answer the question."

"He is not Taras," I said after a few moments' consideration.

"That is a lie," said Rudersdorf. "You say that, Aura Soltikoff, to slip through our fingers."

"Mademoiselle will, of course, prove the truth of her assertion. All that we want is to escape the grave responsibility of taking an innocent man, and an English subject, to Russia. That is of very much more importance to us, individually, than the capture of Prince Borgensky. A line from him in answer to a little note from you—"

"I will write nothing," said I quickly.

"Mademoiselle misapprehends the consequences altogether. The communication endangers us, not the prince. The moment he hears that you are a prisoner on board a Russian vessel he will inform the police, who must immediately force us to set you at liberty. The prince will not leave the shore; he will have the protection

of the police. Is not that obvious? Are there any reasonable grounds for refusing such a perfectly safe arrangement?"

I set myself to think it out. The proposal indeed seemed harmless enough. If Taras went to the police, what was there to fear? But would he seek the assistance of the police, knowing that we were in instant danger of being taken away? At that hour, could he find anyone to act in the matter? No; I felt sure that he would do no such thing. It was the course that Kavanagh would take—that a prudent man would take, but not Taras. He would not waste a moment even in reflection. He would simply follow the impulse of the moment, the dictate of his heart, and rush off at all speed with the man who brought the news of our peril to rescue us. Consideration of the consequences to himself would control his action no more than it would the impulse of a mother to throw herself under the horses' feet to save her child.

"No," said I, "I will not write a word."

"At the very least, mademoiselle will allow us to verify the fact by unaided inquiry. To do that we must know where the real Taras lives."

Again I reflected. The old man seemed so anxious to avoid getting himself into trouble that it allayed suspicion of his desire to do mischief to somebody else. If I gave the address —the address which, he proceeded to point out, he could discover by inquiry in the course of a few hours—what then? Why, then, he would send a message from us—by the waterman, perhaps—which would have precisely the same effect as a written letter. Oh, that smiling, cunning old gentleman!

"No, no," said I; "I won't say a word. I'll do nothing to help you."

Rudersdorf started up and said with savage impatience—

"The consequence of refusal you know. Deportation to Siberia, with flogging and—and all the rest. You expose yourself even to torture.

You may share the fate of Vera Ofromoff and a hundred others."

"On the other hand," added the bland old gentleman, "you will be at once returned to your friends, with a handsome present by way of compensation. How much might we say, baron?"

Rudersdorf drew out a note book, tore out a note, and held it temptingly before me. Seized with passionate fury, I snatched it from his hand, crumpled it up, and flinging it upon the ground, cried—

"Keep it till I offer to sell my friend!"

Regarding me through his narrowed eyes, he said with a cynical sneer—

"Very dramatic, very clever, but a little overdone, my good girl. No woman would throw away a thousand roubles like that if there were any chance of getting it. Call some one to take her down below. This is no more than we were led to expect by what Kavanagh told us about the girl's cunning."

The secretary went to the door and called—reluctantly, I thought.

"We are under Kavanagh's orders," continued Rudersdorf in a tone of self-justification. "Those orders are explicit, and we must obey. We have taken proper precautions, and if we are cheated the fault will lie with the Minister for trusting Kavanagh."

The same men who had taken Gordon away came to the door.

"You have secured the prisoner?" asked Rudersdorf.

One of the men laid a key on the table as he responded in the affirmative.

"Take this lady down to Sophia Otchkin; they will share the same cabin. Lock them in and bring me the key. Keep the door gratings open and watch the prisoners closely. Report any movement of a suspicious kind to me immediately."

Turning to me he added—

"Mademoiselle, you will please to go below

to your cabin. I need only warn you that any attempt to raise an alarm or make your escape will compel us to use restrictive measures of a very severe character."

This warning had no deterrent effect upon my mind, but rather stimulated my faculties in the other direction. The mere prospect of overreaching my captors was sufficient inducement to attempt an evasion.

I could make out nothing when I left the dark cabin but a misty glow of light from the engine room, the figure of the guard who led the way carrying a ship's lantern, and the man who marched by my side holding my arm. The chance of getting away looked hopeless indeed.

Farther on, however, I caught sight of a lantern standing on the deck by the open gangway through which we had come from the boat below, and that suggested a means of getting away—wildly impracticable, perhaps, but not impossible.

The boat in which the waterman lay, still in

the bewilderment of returning consciousness, had been pushed adrift by the order of Rudersdorf the moment we were out of it. But the other boat—the one that had taken us in tow, —might still be there. The lantern and the open gangway favoured the belief. Probably it had been kept there in readiness pending the result of our examination. The men who guarded me now were the same, most likely, whom I had seen come from the beershop and file down to the river; it was not unreasonable, then, to think that the boat might now be empty. If I could possibly reach it and throw off the head line, it would be impossible, almost, to overtake me in the fog, and I might safely drift away with the tide. But how was I to reach the boat? My reason was not so obscured by excitement but that I saw the foolhardiness of attempting to break away from the guard and make a rush for the steps.

We passed the gangway, and the man who led stopped at the covered head of the cabin

stairs, turning towards us and holding up the lantern. At that moment accident gave me the opportunity my imagination failed to discover. My foot catching in a coil of rope, I stumbled forward, wrenching my arm from the loose hold of the man beside me, and at the same time striking the other with such violence that the lantern was jerked from his hand and fell clattering down the cabin stairs.

I saw nothing, but I felt that I was free, and, taking instant advantage of my position, I stepped farther away into the darkness, the guttural ejaculations of the men showing me where they stood.

One of them strode across the deck and fetched the lantern from the head of the gangway. That was just what I wanted: I might pass through unseen now.

The lantern revealed the movement of the guard as they hunted for me—silently, with the knowledge that the discovery of their want of caution would bring them into trouble. I

reached the side of the ship, and swiftly felt my way along until I reached the opening; then, leaning forward, I perceived a feeble light below, which I knew by its movement must be standing in the boat.

Holding my breath, I silently groped forward till I got hold of the rope guard of the steps; then I descended with cautious steps, flattering myself that I was safe when I got below the level of the deck.

The head of the boat was drawn almost close to the platform at the foot of the steps. The glimmer of the lantern was on the gunwale. I found the line that attached it, and with trembling fingers began to unfasten the knot which made it fast to the ladder. Luck seemed to favour me in every way; for my pursuers, looking down from above, could not see me through the fog. I knew that by their murmuring voices, and the fact that they stood there with the lantern, undecided whether to come down or not.

The knot was undone; I held the cord in my hand, and began to draw the boat in that I might step on to it. Even now it would be too late for the men above to take me if they were to run down at their quickest. I stooped to lay hold of the side of the boat and bring it in nearer. One of the men above called down in a low voice. Was he calling to me with an absurd notion that I should reply? I asked with hysterical derision.

The boat was right now; my foot was on the gunwale, when the boat lantern beyond was raised, and its light fell on the face of the man who lifted it. It was my old enemy, Drigo!

"Not this time!" he muttered with a hideous grin as he recognised me.

His crouching position and the malignity in his face led me to think that he meant to spring upon me; and dropping the line, I pushed the boat away with a cry of horror before he could seize the steps to stay himself.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EN ROUTE FOR ST. PETERSBURG.

I WENT up the steps and surrendered myself. The men seized me savagely, and hustled me down below. There I was thrust into a small cabin, and with a few brutal words the men shut the door and turned the key upon me. One of them opened a small grating in the door, and gave some order in a tone of warning to Sophia Otchkin, who stood with her arms akimbo regarding me; she replied with a short laugh, and then there was silence.

A rough deal table stood under the swing lamp that lit the cabin, and beside it a chair. I sat down, and, laying my arms on the table, dropped my face in my hands, quite overcome with physical and mental exhaustion.

A dreadful presentiment that I should never again see Taras broke down the last support of fortitude, and I burst into tears. This fit of weeping afforded me a certain kind of relief, and when it had passed I lifted my head and wiped away my tears, trying to console myself with the reflection that I had saved Taras from the fate that awaited me.

Sophia Otchkin drew a cup of tea from a samovar that stood on a little sideboard and set it before me, telling me in Russian that I must make the best of a bad job.

"After all," said she, "one is better off here than in Siberia."

I asked her as well as I could how she knew I was going to Siberia.

"Why," said she, "it isn't likely they would take so much trouble to get you away from this country if there was any chance of your being allowed to return to it."

This set my tears flowing again, as I thought of Taras and the happy life I had led with him;

for the reaction had set in, and I was now quite prostrate—weaker than a child.

"Come, come," said she, not unkindly, "drink your tea and lie down. Sleeping is better than weeping."

Then, as I dried my eyes again and sipped the tea, she continued—

"There is no luxury here, and poor accommodation for a lady used to a gentle life such as I guess, by your dress and looks, you are accustomed to. But I have done the best I could to prepare for you. See, the sheets are clean, and the bed is not amiss."

As she spoke she turned down the clothes of the bunk on one side of the cabin. Looking round I saw that a similar bunk was fixed on the side opposite.

"That is mine," she explained, "for we shall share the same cabin to the end of the voyage. As for the grating, I will hang my apron over it, and Ivan Ivanovitch will say nothing. I have not been a warder in the

Ravelin ten years for nothing, and he knows it. Look you, there's a change of things for you when you get up to-morrow," she added, opening a drawer that filled the space under the bunk ; " the best I could get for the money the baron gave me."

" Then you expected that I should be brought on board ? "

" To be sure I did—alive or dead. But I'm glad it's turned out as it has, for it's unlucky to start on a voyage with a corpse aboard."

A rap at the door, and a word from the guard outside commanding silence, put an end to the conversation, although Sophia Otchkin's voice had scarcely risen above a whisper. She shrugged her shoulders, raising her finger to intimate that we must talk no more, and made a sign to me to go to bed.

I had matter enough for reflection and speculation when I lay down in the narrow cot. It was clear that Kavanagh had deceived me. He had not intended that we should go to the

"Mariner's Joy." That was of little importance. The more serious point was that, from the first, he must have determined that I should be taken away with Gordon. What would have happened had I yielded to Gordon's persuasion and suffered him to go alone from Rotherhithe? I could not doubt that the gaunt driver and Drigo had instructions in that case to prevent my return to Lambeth. "Alive or dead," I was to be taken on board after him. But why?

I could not answer that question. Indeed, I scarcely tried at that time; for it seemed to me of no importance what purpose he had now that the object was achieved, and whether I lived or died was of little moment if I were to see Taras no more.

Towards morning, as I conclude, from the length of time I had lain awake, the stillness of night, emphasised by the heavy breathing of Sophia Otchkin asleep in her bunk, was broken by the busy sound of preparation for departure. Heavy feet tramped about upon the deck above;

a rope splashed in the water alongside; orders were shouted; there was a hoarse hissing of steam, and the violent rattling of an engine accompanied the deeper rumble of a chain. The hollow roar of a steam whistle followed, and then the vessel began to vibrate to the shrill hiss of steam and monotonous thud of machinery in the engine room.

"We're off, Heaven be praised!" murmured Sophia Otchkin, turning over in her sleep.

I did not close my eyes till after the murky daylight had become visible through the round porthole; but while my companion was dressing I fell asleep, and did not awake until she shook my shoulder.

"It is nearly midday," said she. "Your dinner will be brought down soon. It is time to rise."

I stepped out of the cot and stood looking about me stupidly. My head ached terribly; it was with difficulty that I realised my situation.

"Are we there?" I asked stupidly, observing

that there was no sound of engine or movement.

She laughed, and told me we were still in the river, having been compelled to drop anchor again because of the fog.

I tried to move, but, overcome by a deadly feeling of nausea and giddiness, I fell to the ground. That was the beginning of an illness which lasted nearly a week; for half that time I was unconscious, and I think this was Nature's means of obtaining rest for my overtaxed faculties.

The first day that I was strong enough to rise and dress myself the old gentleman, who had visited me frequently and shown greater kindness and consideration than I might have expected from him, came in to see me, just after I had finished a basin of broth.

"Come," said he, after congratulating me on my recovery, "we are beginning the week well. After groping our way down this execrable river at a snail's pace, here we are at last in the open

sea, with a bright sun and a clear sky overhead. I thought mademoiselle was going to give us the slip after all; but now," he added, rubbing his hands as if the prospect were the cheerfullest in the world—"now we can count upon reaching St. Petersburg without any further hitch, all safe and sound."

Seeing that this promise failed to exhilarate me, he asked me if I would like to go upon deck for a little while. I accepted the offer eagerly.

I had never before seen the sea, and the vast expanse of blue water which surrounded us quite took away my breath with surprise. Then the calm, melancholy beauty of it touched my heart, and, being still very weak, my lip twitched, and I had much ado to keep down the rising tears as the vision of my dear friend came into my mind. Every memory of happiness was associated with Taras—I had learnt to see and know things through him, looking with his eyes, feeling with his heart—and it seemed to me that nothing in

the world could give me joy unless he were with me to share it; nay, I felt that henceforth I could look upon no scene of beauty, listen to no sweet sound, without feeling the loss of him doubly.

The old gentleman placed a seat for me in a sheltered corner, and made me comfortable with rugs, trying his utmost to charm away the deep dejection which my wretched face betrayed. Rudersdorf came up and spoke courteously to me; but I could not bear them—their presence irritated me. I wanted to be alone that I might loosen my grief, and cry and cry and cry without restraint.

A white bird skimmed over the calm blue water.

"Taras would tell me its name," I said to myself, and this simple reflection—the mere want of a single word from him—so overcame me that I was fain to cover my bowed face with my hands to conceal my lack of courage.

Rudersdorf and the old gentleman withdrew

in silence. Then, ashamed of myself, I dried my eyes, resolving that they should not see such an exhibition again.

Presently I heard a quick step approaching, and looking up with choking eagerness, I saw Gordon coming towards me, with anxiety in his kind face. I dropped my head with leaden disappointment, for in that one moment I had conceived it possible that Taras had come to satisfy my yearning.

"My dear mademoiselle!" he said with tender solicitude as he held my hand, "I hear you have been awfully ill—I can see it."

"That's all over—I'm all right now," I replied.

"Begad, a week down below in an atmosphere of pea soup, it's enough to knock anyone up. But this will soon bring you round, eh? By Jove!" he added, throwing up his head and drawing a deep breath of the pure air, "this is like rising from the dead."

He seated himself on a coil of rope by my

side, and with cheerful encouragement in his voice continued—

"Don't you take it to heart, mademoiselle. It'll all come right, you'll see. If they only let us come up on deck now and then—and there's no reason to keep us down below now we're out of the river, and may scream ourselves hoarse without getting an echo for reply—this police outrage will simply give us a jolly nice little holiday at the expense of the Russian Government. I've thought it all out while I've been stewing down below, and it's just the certainty of turning the tables on these muddle-headed, meddling officials that has kept me from knocking down my gaolers—or trying to, at any rate—and making a dash for freedom. Didn't know you were on board till just now, you know. And what on earth they have brought you for is a mystery which I will get you to clear up some time or other. Not to-day; wait till you're a bit more fit. You don't feel up to talking much, do you?"

I shook my head.

"I thought not. But it doesn't worry you to hear me running on in this style? You may be sure it isn't for want of sympathy."

"I know that. You wouldn't do anything unkind. Go on."

"Well, as I was saying, I've thought the whole thing out, and I see exactly what will happen. When we get to St. Petersburg we shall be received like princes—not Russian princes, you know. The minister will wait upon us with a thousand-and-one apologies; for of course he has learnt already by telegraph of the blunder these fellows have made. Naturally he will try to exonerate himself, but he'll take pains to conciliate us to the utmost of his ability—no fear of that. And he will afford us every means to get out of Russia as soon as possible—that's equally certain. And home we will go by the way of Berlin and Paris, with a day or two's rest here and there to make the journey pleasant. Then one fine morning we will wake up old

Taras by marching into Lambeth to the tune of 'See the Conquering Hero—and heroine—Come.' Eh?"

"No," said I, shaking my head; "that will never be."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I CONFESS TO GORDON.

"My dear girl," remonstrated Gordon, "is any one lying ill in a stuffy cabin with nothing to breathe but yellow fog in a position to see things in anything but a gloomy light? Are you yet in a condition to form an impartial judgment on the affair? Now if you had been pondering the matter with a clear head as I have been doing for the past week—"

"But you don't know all the facts," I said, interrupting him.

Pulling his beard, he reluctantly admitted that this was true. "And," he added, "it's true that I've had to draw a good deal on my imagination to square things comfortably.

However, we are not going to discuss the matter to-day. It can easily stand over till you are stronger, and then if it's necessary we'll have all the facts and make the best we may of 'em."

I assented to this proposal with a sigh, knowing that the truth must be told; but I was grateful for the delay, feeling so feeble and downhearted.

"One thing we may be certain of," said he: "this is going to turn out all right for us. Why, look, mademoiselle," he added with exhilarating cheerfulness, "who would have expected yesterday to see the blue sky to-day and the wide sea glittering in glorious sunshine? Yet the sun was shining away up there in the heavens just as it does now, which shows, don't you know? that there's always a bright side to things if we could only look beyond 'em."

I nodded. It was just in that way Taras talked, only more eloquently.

"Everything passes away except the mercy of God," he continued with a reverence inspired,

perhaps, by the beauty that surrounded us; "and we who have no great sins on our conscience, don't you know? may face the worst luck with a pretty sure reliance on that mercy and justice being extended to us."

We stayed upon deck until the sun sank in the golden sea, but the kind-hearted fellow said not another word on the subject that obviously caused me such depressing anxiety. He knew a great deal about ships and the sea, and told me many stories of his adventures in a yacht with so much humour that more than once I was forced to smile.

We were closely watched by Rudersdorf and the old gentleman, who, seeing by the openness of our manner that we were not hatching plots, marked their satisfaction by promising that we should come on deck the following day if the weather held fair.

The wind freshened in the night, but the sea was not rough enough to prevent my going on deck after breakfast, though I found it

difficult to keep my feet under this novel condition of things.

Gordon was waiting for me at the head of the stairs in a fur jacket he had bought from one of the sailors. He had a pipe in his mouth, and his face was radiant with boyish delight.

"I'm glad to see you have not been ill," said he, taking my arm to steady me.

"Oh, that's all past."

"Sea-sick, I mean."

"I don't know how anyone can be sick on the sea," I replied, looking out over the dancing waters. They seemed to me as grand in their strength as they had been beautiful in their calm repose; and the fresh air gave me new life.

He glanced at me in perplexity as he steered me across to the corner he had already prepared. We seated ourselves, and Rudersdorf sent us a couple of rugs and a tarpaulin, with which we made ourselves very snug and comfortable.

"I'm a bit puzzled, mademoiselle," said

Gordon, when Rudersdorf and his secretary had left us; "from one or two remarks you made yesterday, and what you said just now, one would think you had never been on the sea before."

"I saw it for the first time yesterday."

"Then how in the world did you get across when you came from Russia?" he said in amazement.

"I have never been in Russia. I fancy I was born in Shadwell; any way, I lived there as long as I can remember, and never left it till last year."

"But—but you speak French like a native."

"That's because I speak nothing else at home; because I could not speak English like you or anyone else who has been educated; because Taras wished me to begin a new life and break away from all that had gone before—"

"Look here, mademoiselle," Gordon said, stopping me with apprehension in his tone, "if this sort of thing will upset you, you know—"

"No, no. I'm strong now. I must tell you what I had not the courage to tell you yesterday. I ought to have told you the first thing, because I've no right to profit by your kindness until I know whether you can forgive me or not."

"Oh, I say, don't you know?"—Gordon expostulated uneasily.

Disregarding his remonstrance, I told my story as simply as I could, relating all that had taken place between Kavanagh and myself truthfully, and with a desire to say nothing which might bias his judgment.

His pipe went out as he listened, astonishment holding him spellbound. We looked each other straight in the eyes until I had spoken the last word. Then with the reflection that through my act this good, honest, innocent man was being taken from his sweetheart—from all that was dear to him—to be exiled possibly in some Arctic village, to live there in eternal winter with no better companion than myself,

I dropped my head and waited in trembling uncertainty for his verdict.

What if he never forgave me! If his heart hardened against me now it would not soften under the influence of hardships, privation, and misery. Under these conditions I felt that I myself should become dull, peevish, and miserable. Could he who had never known misfortune bear up against it? Could he think of Judith without cursing me for ruthlessly separating them—blighting her happiness and his? Chained together, must we not live like a couple of savage animals deprived of liberty, venting our spite upon each other in perpetual bitterness of spirit, till one at last escaped the misery of existence by death?

He did not leave me long in doubt as to his present feeling.

"You're a brick!" he said—"a regular brick!" and taking my hand he pressed it warmly.

"I—I didn't expect *you* to think so," said I.

"Why, you don't think I could have any grudge against you for making me useful, do you? You have led me to do no more than I should willingly have done to save old Taras if I had been asked; and if it were otherwise, that would not alter my esteem for you—not a bit. It's this devotion that I admire you for. A real, genuine, womanly woman, don't you know? should stick at nothing, but go bang through thick and thin for a man. Judith, I believe, would do as much for me if it came to the pinch. If not (and I knew it)—well, she wouldn't be *my* Judith, that's all. Don't give way, little woman," he continued, seeing my lips twitch perhaps, for his generous enthusiasm touched me greatly; "you have done all that you could do, and it's bound to turn out right. I have unbounded confidence in Kavanagh."

"Have you?" I asked hopefully.

"I should think so! Why he's one of the subtlest, shrewdest, cleverest men in London. He's not a fool, I can tell you."

"No; I didn't think he might be that exactly, but—"

"I see. You thought it possible that he might be something worse. Well, that's excusable, for when a man owns up to doing other people you can never feel quite sure that he isn't doing you. You see, we can't all tell the truth and hit straight out from the shoulder. That's the bother of it. Just look what a lot of humbug exists in the world. Society can't get on without it; and if humbug is necessary, then there must be men to do the humbugging. That's logic. Why, take this case, for example: without lying how could Kavanagh have circumvented the smartest police in the world—how could he have got over the Minister of Police and those crafty rascals and upset their villainous game?"

"Is it certain that he is deceiving them, and not us?" I asked.

"Wait a bit. This wants a deuced lot of cool judgment. Let me have a pipe."

He lit his pipe and puffed out great streams of smoke before he spoke again.

"It's pretty evident that he must be on our side and against the police, because he is a sworn Nihilist, you know."

"But unknown to the Nihilists he is an agent of the police at the same time."

"Playing a double game."

"He can't serve both faithfully."

"True."

"If he were simply playing the part of a spy on the police, he would not be so terribly afraid of being discovered by the Nihilists."

"I can't make that out myself. It certainly seems that he is more in fear of the Nihilists than of the police."

"Why should he be a Nihilist—he's not a Russian?"

"No, but he's an Irishman."

"He would gain nothing by being a Nihilist," I objected.

"On the other hand, he would get hand-

somely paid by the police. I know all that, mademoiselle; and I know also that Kavanagh's views are all of a cynical, Nihilistic kind; still, hang it all, one must give a man credit for some principle—some higher aim than making money."

"Even if he is an agent of police?" I asked.

He shook his head, and, murmuring that it was "a precious hard nut to crack," lapsed into silence.

When he had taken three or four pulls at his pipe, he said—

"I think I know what has shaken your faith in Kavanagh. If his object was to get a false arrest made, to get it published in the papers, and raise a public outcry leading to an international row which would prevent any further attempt to kidnap Taras, it strikes you as odd that we should be a whole week in the Thames and then be allowed to steam out here without any attempt being made to overhaul the vessel and find us. But you must

remember that we left our moorings before the affair could be made public, and that the fog which stopped us from getting out of the river prevented our being found there. As a matter of fact we worked right out of the mouth of the river before the fog cleared. I saw that from my cabin porthole. Every day we pushed on little by little."

"No," I said, "it isn't that which has shaken my faith."

"What then?"

"It may be my altered position that raises suspicion in my mind. Before, I was in constant suspense and feverish anxiety — quite unable to reason calmly. Terrified by the idea that the failure of this scheme would result in the murder of Taras, all my arguments were in favour of its accomplishment."

"I understand that. I know how I felt at that time. The marvel to me is that you kept your head through it all as well as you did. But is there any fact—has anything occurred—which

directly supports your suspicions? That's what I should like to get at."

"Kavanagh led me to believe that when you were arrested I should be free to return to Taras. Can you tell me why I was brought on board with you?"

"You would come, you know."

"But there is evidence enough that had I not come of my own accord I should have been brought here by force. From the very outset it was known on board here that I was to be taken away with you."

"Hang me if I can explain that arrangement: can you?"

"Yes; it was necessary to get rid of me."

"Why?"

"That I might not tell tales."

"But if the whole story is to come out?"

"It is not to come out," I said, with the emphasis of conviction. "He never intended that it should. If this affair were made public, inquiry would lead to the discovery of his share

in it, a discovery that would be fatal to him. His life—to him at least—is as valuable as yours. Why should he commit suicide to save you from exile? He has ties in England just as you have—interests, friends."

"That's true."

"Supposing that he has a real desire to save Taras?"

"Supposing, in fact," Gordon interpolated with a harder voice, "that he is not an unmitigated villain—that even a rascal may have one redeeming quality—well?"

"Yes, supposing that, may not the temptation to save him at our expense be greater than the alternative of giving up everything and jeopardising his life?"

"For the sake of common honesty," added Gordon. "Well, I admit it looks feasible."

Nevertheless he twisted himself round uneasily, as if I were tempting him away from faith in the honour of a friend—lowering his esteem of mankind and woman too.

"But the truth must come out at some time," he remonstrated, still with his face turned from me.

"Why, whom can we tell in Russia? Who will hear our voices when we are in Siberia?"

"But the police must learn in time, by his works, that Taras is still free."

"Is it likely that they will send you back to England to prove their fault?"

He knocked out his pipe slowly on the deck before he made any reply. Then, drawing a long breath, he said—

"Well, we shall see if you are right, mademoiselle, when we get to Russia."

"Too late," said I, with deep contrition in my heart. "I ought to have found that out before."

"Oh, my dear girl!" he cried, turning again quickly to me with the genial warmth that characterised him, "whatever turns up, you must always be held blameless. If this man has the skill to deceive a pack of suspicious Nihilists, or

the not less suspicious police as the case may be, is it likely that an inexperienced girl could be proof against his artifice? You may be sure that he proportioned the means nicely to the end, and would have been ready with some other device if this had failed. You're not the only one deceived; here am I to justify you, led like a lamb by the man I professed to know; so no more self-reproaches." Then giving my hand a hearty shake, he added, "Are we not companions in adversity?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WE SET OUT FOR ORKUTSK.

Subsequent events led me to believe that our conversation that day was overheard by Rudersdorf from behind the tarpaulin which screened us from the wind. He could have learnt little from the grotesque polyglot in which we talked —a jargon of colloquial French and English which I have attempted only to put into readable form—but he might have gathered from that, and our perfect openness of discussion, that neither Gordon nor I was Russian, and that we had nothing to conceal. Further than this, I am inclined to think he suspected by our earnest tone that we were concerting measures for communicating with our friends when we

reached our journey's end; for we were allowed to see each other no more until we arrived at St. Petersburg, and then only at a distance, as we were hurried from the train that brought us from the port into the separate carriages in which we were rattled off to the prison.

In that moment Gordon waved his hand to me and smiled encouragingly, but I knew that the poor fellow, despite his sanguine temperament, could find but little ground to base hope upon.

There was nothing in the manner of the two officials who met us on the platform to indicate the courteous consideration due to victims of judicial error. They saluted Rudersdorf and his secretary, but they only stared at us with the careless curiosity of gaolers for a new batch of prisoners. I knew then that Kavanagh had betrayed us; and when the heavy door of my cell in the fortress swung to and the great bolt was shot, I felt that we were doomed.

About an hour after my arrival I was taken

down to an office where the Minister of Police sat at the head of a writing-table. He wore a fur coat and gloves; his hat stood on the table beside an open register. The only other persons present were Rudersdorf and the old gentleman; their manner was obsequiously deferential towards their chief, sharp and severe towards me.

With a slight inclination of the head he told me to take a chair, and, fixing his dark, penetrating eyes upon me, said—

"Mademoiselle, do you deny that Taras, Prince Borgensky, is your friend?"

"No," I replied proudly; "he is the dearest friend I have in the world." These words brought tears to my eyes, so that I saw everything as in a mist; but I brushed them away impetuously, and met the Minister's eyes firmly, and with the resolve to keep my emotion down.

"Then how comes it," the Minister asked, "that you have aided in bringing him here?"

"I have done no such thing. The man you

have here is not Taras, but George Gordon. If you are the Minister of Police you will know that when you see him."

"Assuming that this is George Gordon, why did you aid in bringing him here?"

"To save Taras from being murdered by your agent, Rudersdorf."

"Is this the first time you have endeavoured to save your friend?"

"No; I have balked Kavanagh in two, if not three, attempts to carry him away."

"And you hoped to save Taras a fourth time by substituting George Gordon to mislead our agents?"

"Yes."

"You thought to throw off the pursuit by making us believe that we had captured Taras?"

"Yes."

"Then why are you so anxious now to make us believe that we have not got Taras?"

"Because Kavanagh made me believe that the moment you discovered the mistake Rudersdorf

would be banished in disgrace, while a public outcry would compel you to abandon any further effort to remove Taras from England."

"You are candid at any rate," said the Minister, after exchanging a swift glance with Rudersdorf.

"I want you to know the whole truth."

"In that case will you be good enough to give me the particulars of the attempts made by Mr. Kavanagh to kidnap Taras?"

I narrated the events as simply as I could. When I came to an end the Minister said—

"Can you imagine what motive Mr. Kavanagh had in sending you also to Russia?"

"To get rid of me. He is a Nihilist. If I told what I know about him—what I have told you—he himself would stand in danger of assassination."

"There is no other motive that you are aware of?"

"None."

The Minister turned in his chair, and,

looking reflectively at the floor, slowly drew off his right glove. Then he took up a pen and wrote a few lines on a clean sheet of paper, just as a physician might make out a prescription for a patient. He handed the paper to Rudersdorf, and, rising, took up his hat.

"What are you going to do with me?" I asked.

"During the inquiries which must necessarily be made to ascertain the truth of your statement, you will be detained. You will be provided with every available comfort, and in consideration of the straightforward manner in which you have given information, if there is any reasonable concession I can make—"

"George Gordon. I want to see him," said I, for I felt the need of a companion; all my sentiment with regard to our living like chained beasts had vanished, and my heart now only quaked with the fear of never seeing him again.

The chief looked gravely at his hand as he pressed down the fingers of his perfectly fitting

glove; then, after giving some instructions to Rudersdorf, he said to me—

"You shall see him to-morrow morning," and with a slight bow left the office.

As soon as he was gone, Rudersdorf looked at the written order, and the old gentleman, peering over his shoulder, exclaimed in a low tone—

"Orkutsk?"

I did not know the meaning of the word then, but I bore it in mind, for it seemed to have a peculiar significance for the two agents, and I thought as they bade me "Adieu" when the warder came to remove me that there was a touch of regret in their voices, almost as if they were bidding me farewell for ever.

I was taken back to the cell, and as the door closed with a clang, and I looked round the four bare whitewashed walls, with its one barred window high up, showing but a few inches of leaden sky, I asked myself where was the comfort that had been promised me.

In the evening a warder brought me a bundle of thick serge clothes and a greasy sheepskin coat, telling me that I should have to wear them for my journey, and that I must get up when I was called. This was the first intimation I had received that we were to be removed from St. Petersburg. The Minister had spoken only of detention. Where were we to go? Orkutsk—was that the name of our destination? He had said that I should see Gordon the next morning; but was it only to say "Good-bye?"

Before it was light the warder entered my cell, and, setting a candle on the shelf that served as a table, told me I must be dressed in ten minutes. In ten minutes I was dressed in my ill-fitting clothes, looking more like a white bear than a human creature in the great sheepskin coat, which touched the ground at my feet, and was furnished with a hood and a collar band that left nothing visible of my face except my nose and eyes. A pair of enormous boots lined

with sheepskin, and great fingerless gloves of the same kind, added still more to the uncouthness of my appearance. The warder brought me a mug of hot tea and some dried fish and bread, and while I ate my breakfast made up the clothes I had worn into a bundle for me to take with me.

I was taken down into the yard where, to my great joy, I found Gordon arrayed in a suit similar to my own, by which I concluded that he was to go away also. I think he was no less pleased to see me; he gave me both hands, and we stood there hand in hand, too grateful to speak at first.

"You are going with me?" we said at last and simultaneously.

"Yes," said he; "though where we are going I can't say."

"Orkutsk, I believe."

"Orkutsk, hey? Well, that's got a sort of outlandish sound about it. But what does that matter? We shall come here again

before very long, that's a certainty. I let the Minister have it pretty straight, I can tell you. Threatened him with the *Times* and all sorts of punishment."

A sledge was brought into the yard—for the ground was already covered with snow. It was drawn by three horses, each with a bell in the arc over the saddle. Inside there was a lot of baggage and letter bags, for this, I believe, was the mail sledge. The driver arranged it so as to form a comfortable seat under the hood, and gave us two large pillows, he himself sitting in front. When we were ready to start a couple of mounted Cossacks came out.

"This is our bodyguard," said Gordon. "Didn't I promise you that we should be treated like princes? A prince! Wait till I've lit my pipe, and one of us, I know, will be as happy as a king!"

The Cossacks, peering in at us, wore the queerest expression of perplexity imaginable. Never before, perhaps, had they seen an exile

starting out for Orkutsk with such a jovial, happy-go-lucky air as Gordon's.

"Five o'clock," said Gordon, looking at his watch as we passed under the lamp over the gates of the fortress. "They haven't taken a thing from me—though, of course, I was searched for incriminating papers—not a thing! That's a convincing proof that our detention is merely formal, and that we are bound by nothing tougher than red tape. In fact, I don't feel like a prisoner, do you, sister Aura?"

It was, indeed, hard to realise that we were still in the iron grasp of the police when the Cossacks, falling to the rear, were out of sight. My despondent misgiving gave place to the hopeful ideas imparted by my friend, and my spirits rose under the exhilarating influences of the journey. The air, though intensely cold, was bright and clear; the stars shone sharp and bright in the sky; the snow was hard, and the horses sped along swiftly to the musical clash of the bells over their backs.

We did not stop till we reached the post-house where the horses were changed. There we had a very good lunch, and after the indispensable cup of tea we started afresh, quite pleased to go on.

"This is something like a journey *d'agrémong!*" said Gordon as he lit another pipe and nestled up in his corner.

"Yes, if there's nothing worse than this!" said I, but not at all in a tone of misgiving.

It was getting dark when we overtook a train of miserable convicts marching with clanking chains along the road. Our driver reined in to a walking pace in order to talk to one of the guards.

A good-looking young fellow in a grey suit, with a diamond patch in the back like the other prisoners, but without irons, spoke to us in an undertone. Gordon replied in French, saying that we did not speak Russian.

"Oh, I thought by the Cossacks accompanying you that you were prisoners," answered he

in very fair English, detecting at once that Gordon was not French.

"So we are for the moment. Fact is, we are accused of being Nihilists."

"And of course you are not?" our acquaintance replied with a slightly ironical accent.

"Not a bit of it. We are simply taking a journey *d'agrémong*" (Gordon was proud of that dreadful phrase) "at the expense of your Government."

"Oh, a *voyage d'agrément*. Where to?"

"I don't know where it is, but I believe the name of the place is Orkutsk."

"Orkutsk. I thought they had given up banishing prisoners so far north as that. You may reach there in June—not before. Orkutsk! Well, it's something to be able to travel to Hell comfortably! *Bon voyage!*"

CHAPTER XXXV.

WE MAKE OUR ESCAPE.

"Now, that's the sort of thing I abominate," said Gordon as the driver cried to his horses, and we parted company with the train of convicts. "The poor beggar is unhappy, of course; but why should he try to make us wretched, too, by a gratuitous lie?"

Nor would he be persuaded that the young man might have told the truth, and that Orkutsk was the remote Arctic settlement he had represented it to be.

About an hour later we reached the étape where we were to stay for the night.

I had heard much of the horrors of these stations and the loathsome "kameras," or

sleeping-places, in which the convicts were herded, and I had seen them in the collection of paintings exhibited by Taras. I was therefore astonished to find the log hut in which I passed the night so decent and habitable. It was not overcrowded; there was a rough carpet to the floor, and the only real hardship was the absence of bed and bedding—for we had to sleep on a sloping board and in our clothes—an overheated atmosphere, and an unpleasant smell from the clothing which the poor women who had been tramping through the snow all day hung upon the brick stove to dry. But the women were few in proportion to the men, and my companions were not criminal themselves, but merely relatives of the men they were voluntarily accompanying into exile.

I was much better off than my companion, who was thrust into a den built to accommodate 250 prisoners, with no fewer than 710 criminals of all sorts; and the horrors of that night were more, I believe, than he could make light of, for

he was extremely reticent upon the subject. All that he told me was that he had found no room to lie down, and had breathed a little atmosphere of his own by smoking all night.

"However," said he cheerfully, "that's all past, and I shall make up for a sleepless night by a good long snooze this afternoon—if we don't come to the end of our journey before."

We went on by another mail sledge, but with the same guard who had left St. Petersburg with us.

These two Cossacks never left us throughout our long journey, which continued without any break, save the nightly halt at a convict station, for three weeks after we had passed through Moscow. Soon after leaving that city behind us I noticed a change in poor Gordon. His spirits seemed to be losing their elasticity, his gaiety to be a little forced, his pipe more necessary. Sometimes he sank into fits of abstraction, from which he would rouse himself with angry impatience; and once, when he

thought I was dozing, I saw him looking out over the dismal waste of snow with such mournful despair in his honest, kind face that the tears came into my own eyes with sympathy and fellow-feeling. I knew he was thinking of Judith, for the same overwhelming grief filled my heart when my thoughts turned to my beloved friend, Taras. The pipe quivered as he held it in his teeth; then, seeming to swallow something, he pulled away at his pipe as though in that lay his only hope of relief.

At first I thought this change was due to ill health, produced by the pestilential air that night after night he was forced to breathe; but I know now that it arose from a moral and not a physical cause. He had learnt the undisputed fact that Orkutsk was nothing but a settlement of filthy Lapps in a region where the snow only melted for some few weeks and the sun was never seen for months in the year—a place cut off from all communication with the civilised world, and only sparsely peopled by a race of

brutish savages, the filthiest and lowest of the human kind—and to this place he could no longer doubt we were being taken.

But despite the bitter reflections that must have risen to his mind, his attitude towards me displayed no sign of animosity. There was no lapse in his gentleness and tender consideration for my comfort. His kindness was unvarying. Our common misfortune, which I thought would embitter our hearts, served only as a link of sympathy to hold us together. Each had the same grief to bear—a loss greater than that which death inflicts. Time may blunt the sharp edge of sorrow when the loved one is no more; but we mourned not for the dead, but the living, and time could not heal our wound. The position was reversed—in our case it was the dead who had to mourn the living.

Gordon still spoke hopefully, though at rare and rarer intervals, of our being recalled to St. Petersburg; but for my part I had quite abandoned the hope of any revocation of our fate,

when an accident occurred which gave a new turn to our fortunes.

One night I was awoke by a strange outcry of distant voices. As I turned upon the wooden platform that served as our sleeping-place, the woman next to me, who had already sprung up, cried—

"Holy God, we are on fire!"

At that cry all of us slipped to the ground in a moment with mingled exclamations of dismay.

The kamera was full of smoke—it choked us as we breathed—and through the one small casement a dull red glow fell upon us. When we perceived that it was not our kamera, but another, which was in flames, we concluded that it must be the one in which the men were confined; and, shrieking the names of our friends, we rushed at the door, vainly trying to break it open.

The muffled clamour of voices told us that the men were still shut up. Suddenly there was

a great outburst of voices as they forced their door, and the next instant they were crying to us from the outside of our hut, and beating furiously at the door which separated us. We stood back as the heavy panels cracked under the pressure of sturdy shoulders, and presently a mighty thrust burst the lock away, and the door flew back.

In the midst of the wild confusion that followed I felt my arm grasped, and found Gordon by my side.

"Come along, little woman. Don't give way, there's a brick—it's all right."

Half fainting with fright and the suffocating effect of the dense smoke blowing down upon us, I staggered along by his side, past a crowd of panic-stricken wretches, surging about the gate of the yard in expectation of its being opened for them to escape, and then through a shower of sparks and past a roaring and crackling mass of fire into an open space, where it was possible to breathe freely

and get a comprehensive idea of what was going on.

This étape, like most others, consisted of four or five log buildings of a single storey, enclosed by a high palisade of solid logs, planted side by side, and each cut to a sharp point at the top. One of the buildings, used as a storehouse and carpenter's shop, had taken fire, and the wind, which was blowing fiercely, carried flames and smoke down upon the kameras. The end of that one in which Gordon had been shut up was already blazing, and it looked as if all the huts in succession must catch fire and be destroyed; for the officials could do nothing to extinguish the flames, and were solely occupied in dragging what movables were worth saving into the space where we and a few others stood.

Just in front of us was an ugly little man with a red beard. A sardonic grin was on his impish face.

"Look at them," he said, pointing to a

party of warders hauling along a cumbrous piece of furniture. "Half a dozen men choking themselves to save a piece of wood not worth a couple of kopecks, and not one will stir a foot to prevent those poor wretches from trampling each other to death at the locked gate."

"Is there any danger here?" I asked.

He turned round and answered bitterly—

"Yes; there's the danger of living to see the mines of Kara or any other pit of Tophet that our holy Czar in his mercy consigns us to."

Shading his eyes from the glare of the flames, and looking into the smoke, he said—

"If those fools, instead of pounding each other into a jelly, would only pile themselves into a heap systematically, there would be a chance for some of us to snatch a few days' respite in the forest. Hullo!" he exclaimed as a lull came in the conflict of screams and curses. "They're not such fools after all; they've got

the gate off its hinges. I'm off!" And with that he disappeared into the smoke.

The warders also discovered what had happened. Half a dozen ran across to a shed and returned with rifles in their hands. The noise at the gates was over now. The crackling of timber, the soft whirl of rising flame, an occasional thud as a beam fell—these were the only sounds that reached us for a minute or two. Then a shot was fired, and another and another —half a dozen shots, perhaps, and two or three yells answered for echo.

We stood still till the warders returned, one by one, and all was still. Then Gordon, drawing closer to me, whispered—

"Shall *we* try?"

"Yes, yes—we will try," I answered eagerly; for the thought that we also might escape had just then occurred to me.

Gordon slipped down his hand and grasped mine tightly. Between us and the gateway, on which the smoke still blew down in a thick

column, charged with whirling sparks and dropping flakes of fiery ember, stood a couple of warders. One was charging his rifle.

"We must slip behind them and make a dash for the smoke," said Gordon as we edged that way.

We waited one breathless minute, and then, as a roof fell in, throwing up an eddying column of sparks, which drew off the attention of the warders, we slipped quickly behind them and rushed into the smoke.

We were seen. A voice called to us to stop, and a shot was fired after us. But we were already lost to sight. It blinded us; we could see nothing. Presently we were brought up by the palisade, against which we threw ourselves in our blindness.

"It must be this way—we can't have passed it," said Gordon.

We groped our way in mad haste along the palisade, and, stumbling over the bodies of those who had been trampled to death in the frantic

struggle to escape, we reached the open gateway.

Suffocated by the smoke, I reeled and should have fallen, but Gordon, grasping my arm, forced me to bend down—for he dared not open his mouth to speak—and dragged me on. Almost unconsciously I staggered on, until at length we got air to breathe, and saw the plain stretching out all red in the light from the fire to the dark line of forest trees.

But in quitting the smoke we were escaping death in one form only to court it in another; for as we stopped to recover strength, gasping painfully for breath, yet pressing each other's hands in fervent gratitude and congratulation, a hoarse voice called to us, and, turning round, we saw a couple of long-coated warders, standing out darkly against the lurid glow beyond, taking aim at us.

A shot was fired, and instantly Gordon fell. Thinking he was hit, I fell on my knees beside him with a scream of horror, as a second shot

was fired and the ball flew past with a sharp "ping."

"Lie down, for Heaven's sake!" whispered Gordon, dragging me down upon the snow. "I'm all right. They won't trouble themselves any more about us."

Nevertheless I watched them with intense anxiety as they stood there coolly recharging their rifles.

We waited there until another fall of roof or walls within the palisade caused a sudden drop in the brightness of the light.

"Now's the time," whispered Gordon, springing to his feet. "I can't see those fellows, nor they us. If this only lasts for a couple of minutes we may get out of their range."

I rose quickly, and, greatly restored by the few minutes of rest, we sped over the hard snow, hand in hand, at a good pace.

"Can you go just a little farther?" Gordon asked.

"Yes—ever so far," I replied.

But there was no need to run much farther, for the flames had not broken out after the last fall, and now there was nothing but a red glow over the palisade ; and though this was sufficient to illumine the snow it was not strong enough to reveal us to our enemies.

We fell into a brisk walking pace, and kept on till the plain was crossed, and we stood under the pines. Then we stopped to look back at the smouldering kameras and rejoice in our escape.

For my own part I was foolish enough in the hysterical joy of that moment to believe that all our troubles were over.

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